

Community Overdose Engagement (CODE) At-A-Glance: Downtown Providence

May 2021 - August 2022

The Downtown Providence CODE Initiative is a community-driven response to the local substance use and drug overdose epidemic. Each CODE is guided by a diverse collaborative of organizations that works in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) to develop and implement an action plan in response to the most pressing needs of the community. This summary reflects the successes, challenges, and lessons learned throughout the initiative as reported by CODE partners.

Note: The activities and data below reflect the work of the first three years of this initiative. In Year 4, the state combined the three Providence neighborhood-based CODE projects into one citywide effort. This was done in response to community feedback to improve coordination and reach and decrease burden on local organizations."

Primary Activities

- Coordinated a multidisciplinary Downtown Overdose Stakeholder group.
- Collaborated with the Providence 02907 CODE Initiative, particularly to enhance outreach coordination, share in the hiring of staff, and increase distribution of basic needs and harm reduction supplies.
- Provided targeted, stationary outreach at Kennedy Plaza, five hours a day, five days a week to provide harm reduction supplies, basic needs, and connection to services.
- Conducted business outreach and training for local businesses, social services agencies, and other community partners to increase naloxone distribution and awareness of overdose prevention and response efforts.
- Developed communications materials, including an overdose recognition and naloxone administration [training video](#) and posters encouraging people to support their community by carrying naloxone.

Materials Produced

- A naloxone training video with information about overdose recognition and response, in partnership with the 02907 CODE Initiative.
- Posters for community-level distribution as well as billboard and bus shelter ads developed by a local artist. Messaging encouraged people to support their community by carrying naloxone and connecting with local resources.

Data Overview: Downtown Providence CODE Activities

Encounters	Unique clients	Naloxone doses distributed	Fentanyl test strip distribution	Treatment and service referral	Basic needs referral	Naloxone trainings	Stakeholder meetings
9,247	3,877	7,082	2,243	1,507	7,393	54	20

¹From final report.

Facilitators and Successes

Outreach coordination:

- Collaborated with Providence 02907 CODE initiative to outreach to and engage with local businesses and organizations throughout the city.
- Leveraged CODE funding to plan syringe clean up with the Downtown Safety and Providence Parks and Recreation Teams. Collaborated with AIDS Care Ocean State (ACOS) to install and maintain sharps disposal boxes in Kennedy Plaza to promote safe disposal of used syringes.

Safer smoking kit distribution:

- Began in February 2022 and helped to reach members of the Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.

Naloxone training:

- Provided naloxone training in the community through canvassing and the business outreach project.

Staffing:

- Outreach workers who spoke both English and Spanish were on staff at Project Weber/RENEW (PWR). PWR clients volunteered to make harm reduction kits for local distribution.

Communications:

- PWR's outreach coordinator collaborated with Providence's arts community to create overdose awareness posters and partnered with RIDOH to develop a training video about overdose recognition, response, and naloxone administration.

Barriers

Treatment bed availability:

- Peer recovery support specialists and overdose prevention staff faced significant barriers to connect clients to treatment due to lack of available beds in the state.

Fentanyl contamination:

- Increased fentanyl contamination in the drug supply led to increases in overdoses.

Data:

- The Providence Healthy Communities Office needed more reliable methods to fully assess the impacts the service model had on both fatal and non-fatal overdoses and Downtown CODE.
- Additional data on overdose fatality rates by race and ethnicity were needed to have a clearer understanding of existing disparities in fatal overdoses among different populations in Downtown Providence.
- Partner organizations had limited capacity to collect and report programmatic data due to nature of the work (e.g., mobile street outreach) and staffing.

Staffing and outreach coordination:

- Planned to have staff assigned specifically to mobile outreach or business outreach, but there was some overlap between the two workplans.

Silo-ing of CODE work:

- Separating work by ZIP code increased administrative burden and led to the duplication of efforts for the contracted agencies.
- Creation of an effective overdose hot spot approach was difficult without coordination and data from other Providence CODE Initiatives.

Law enforcement:

- The public did not always feel comfortable or safe calling law enforcement, and those who had negative experiences after calling law enforcement to respond to an overdose were reluctant to call again.
- Some clients reported feeling afraid that they would be harassed or arrested by law enforcement for visiting PWR's Downtown drop-in outreach table.

Weather:

- Inclement weather significantly impacted the ability to meet client needs; it often made it more difficult to reach clients.

COVID-19 pandemic:

- The pandemic impacted the ability for CODE to serve clients (i.e., trainings, referrals, outreach) due to unique staffing shortages and mandated social distancing.

Lessons Learned

A citywide CODE approach is more effective

- This approach alleviated some administrative burden, facilitated successful outreach coordination (including safe syringe clean-up and disposal), and prevented duplication of efforts.

Stigma of people who use drugs (PWUD) within police departments needs to be addressed:

- Stigma of PWUD by police departments needs to be addressed. This stigma continued to reduce the likelihood of clients calling 9-1-1 in the event of an overdose.

Quality data helps to inform overdose prevention efforts:

- The data indicators that were developed for this CODE initiative required more clear and standardized definitions.



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