



Joint Statement from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and City of Santa Monica Regarding Harm Reduction Services

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and City of Santa Monica have received questions and feedback from the community about harm reduction services offered in Santa Monica. This joint statement clarifies information about services funded through Los Angeles County. Harm reduction services represent an important tool and component of the multi-pronged provision of prevention, treatment, recovery, and enforcement needed to address the overdose crisis and other threats to health and wellbeing in Los Angeles County.

Overview of Harm Reduction Services

Los Angeles County is currently experiencing the worst overdose crisis in our history. Community-based overdose prevention efforts, specifically inclusive of harm reduction services, are critical to save lives and protect public health and safety.

Harm reduction involves a suite of evidence-based services focused on reducing the negative consequences associated with substance use, including preventing and reversing overdose. Harm reduction services are offered without preconditions or a requirement about a person's readiness to stop using drugs, in recognition that many people are not willing or able to stop using substances. Evidence-based harm reduction services include connections to medical, mental health, and substance use treatment services, peer engagement, distribution of the opioid overdose reversal medication naloxone, distribution of fentanyl and xylazine test strips, infectious disease testing, syringe services programs, and more.

Altogether, these harm reduction services are well demonstrated to reduce overdose deaths, reduce the public use of injectable drugs, reduce transmission of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis, increase access to substance use services, reduce the use of emergency medical services, and increase public safety. For example, in high-risk populations, upwards of 20% of naloxone doses distributed may result in overdose reversals, meaning that a life can be saved for every 5 doses of naloxone distributed.

Because harm reduction services often engage people who do not always pursue health or social services and who are at increased risk of experiencing overdose, including people experiencing homelessness, it is a well-established best practice to provide mobile harm reduction services directly to people where they physically are. Harm reduction syringe services are protected under California law (CA Health & Safety Code § 121349) and harm reduction programs in Los Angeles County can obtain certification through Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, which has operated a harm reduction syringe services certification program since 2005.

Harm Reduction Services in Santa Monica

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's Division of Substance Abuse Prevention

and Control (DPH-SAPC) contracts with Venice Family Clinic to operate an overdose prevention program that operates on Friday afternoons, servicing Reed Park, Tongva Park, and Palisades Park for a cumulative three hours per week involving all three locations. Program services are provided via mobile vans parked adjacent to the parks, and staff in the vans enter the parks to distribute naloxone and to inform people in the park of the nearby van where syringe exchange services are available. LA County transitioned the overdose prevention program and services from the parks themselves to the nearby vans following extensive discussions with the City, prioritizing options that meaningfully provide people at risk of overdose with critically needed harm reduction services and in consideration of community feedback.

The range of harm reduction services offered through DPH-SAPC contracts in Santa Monica include the following:

- Outreach and engagement to discuss the ways an individual can decrease their risk for overdose and to provide connections with treatment. People who are interested in substance use treatment are referred to the Venice Family Clinic substance use treatment SUMMIT program. Hygiene kits are also offered. When people require additional medical interventions, Venice Family Clinic's homeless outreach unit is dispatched to provide care directly to their patients at the patient's location.
- HIV and viral hepatitis testing via Venice Family Clinic's Common Ground program.
- Overdose prevention services including the distribution of both intranasal and injectable naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses. Venice Family Clinic distributes approximately 60 naloxone doses each month within the City, averaging about 12 overdose reversals and lives saved per month. These are lives that would not have been saved had these services not been offered. Venice Family Clinic also collects and exchanges used syringes to ensure they are properly disposed of and offers sharps containers with sterile syringes, empty sharps containers, and injection equipment including alcohol swabs, cotton, sterile water, and band-aids. The exchange of needles is done in the mobile van. Venice Family Clinic serves approximately 30-40 individuals per month in Santa Monica and distributes approximately 100 syringes per month.

Commitment to a Clean and Safe Santa Monica

The City of Santa Monica's Four Pillars approach to addressing homelessness includes balancing enforcement with compassionate and responsive field-based engagement to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness and maintain clean and safe open spaces. The Santa Monica City Council approved funding for new resources programmed into the City's Fiscal Year 2023-2025 budget to support this approach. New resources include an additional multidisciplinary outreach team to cover the balance of the City in addition to the teams already operating in the Downtown and Beach areas, after-hours intake into the Santa Monica Shelter (SAMOSHEL) interim housing program for people referred by City first responders, an expansion of the Santa Monica Police Department's Homeless Liaison Program team to seven days a week, a therapeutic transport van staffed by the Los Angeles County Department of

Mental Health to respond to people experiencing a mental health crisis, and a new specialized City Public Works team for encampment cleanup.