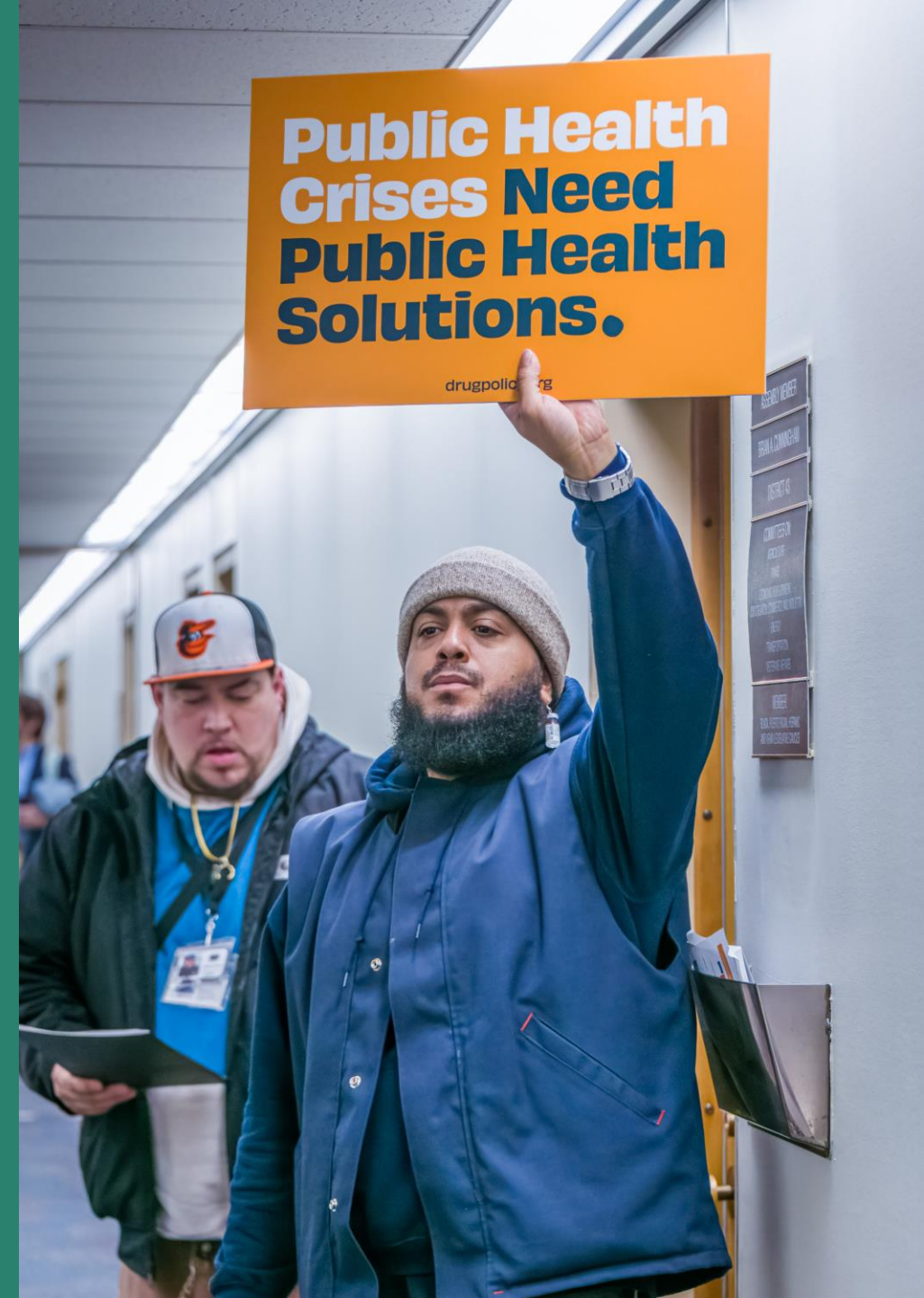


**DRUG
POLICY
ALLIANCE.**

Harm Reduction

Saving Lives During Crises

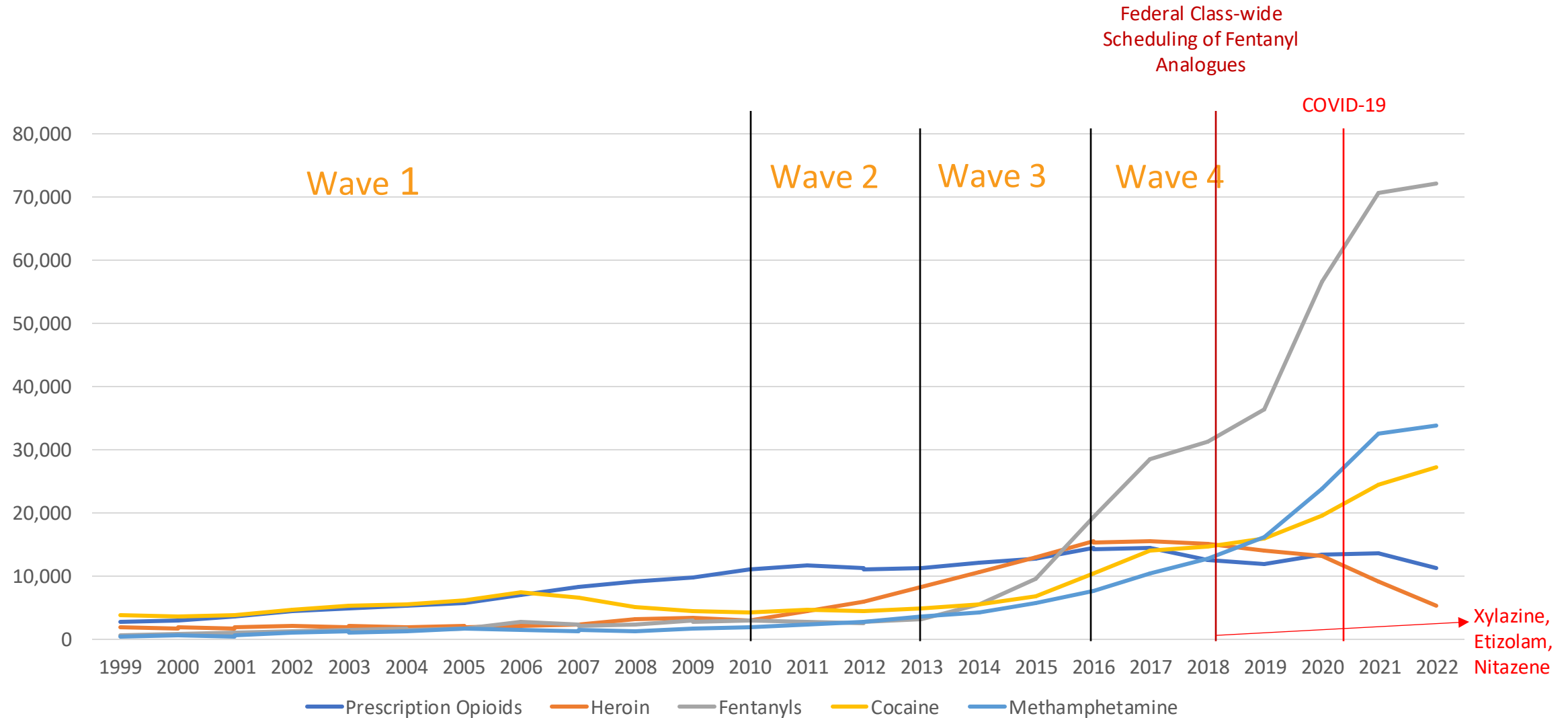
Sheila P. Vakharia PhD MSW
Drug Policy Alliance



Agenda

- The US Overdose Crisis as a Case Study and Comparison
- Stimulant Drugs
 - Drivers and Solutions
 - Social Determinants of Health
 - Public Health, Treatment, Harm Reduction
- Why This Moment Calls for Harm Reduction
- The Harm Reduction Gap

A Crisis in Four Waves



Stimulant Drugs

People Use Stimulants for Reasons



Social Determinants of Health and Risk Environments

Understanding drivers for use:

- Housing instability¹;
- Job or income insecurity²;
- Performance-enhancement³;
- Internalized and Institutional Homophobia and transphobia⁴;
- Inadequate insurance coverage⁵ and untreated health and/or mental health concerns⁶.

Policy Solutions for SDoH and Risk Environments

- Low-threshold housing, including Housing First;
- Decriminalize sex work and other low-level survival offenses;
- Improved worker protections, paid leave and sick time policies;
- Fund LGBTQIA+ programs, centers, services.

Policy proposals to reduce stimulant-related harms must:

1. Address Social Determinants of Health that can exacerbate harms,
2. Increase access to health services (incl. harm reduction and treatment), and
3. Reduce contact between marginalized people who use stimulants and law enforcement

Access to harm reduction and treatment

***“Our harm reduction playbook
was built around opioids”***

-Shilo Jama,
People’s Harm Reduction Alliance
Seattle, WA

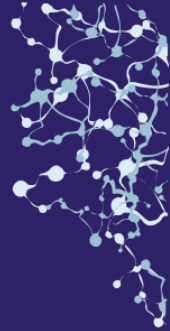
A Harm Reduction Service Provider's Guide to METHAMPHETAMINE & OTHER STIMULANTS

Understanding the brain chemistry

Neurotransmitters relay information about the environment and our internal states from neuron to neuron through the brain's circuits and, ultimately, shape how we respond.

Stimulants alter neurotransmitters by interacting with molecular components of the sending and receiving process.

Instead of ending their regular life cycle, stimulants cause neurotransmitters to stay active longer, causing a large amount of stimulus to be sent to the brain.



Basic harm reduction...



#1

Some people using stimulants inject more frequently & will need more supplies.



#2

If someone is having a hard time on stimulants, remove as much stimulus from the room as possible, or remove the person from the situation.



#3

Providing water & nutritional drinks with dietary supplements can help people using stimulants get the nutrition they need to stay healthy.



#4

Provide cool down spaces for participants to rest for an agreed upon amount of time.

REVIEW:



People using methamphetamine & other stimulants may need help regulating the amount of stimulus their body is taking in. Empty, cool, neutral spaces can help someone in crisis.

Assess when the last time a participant ate or slept. Encouraging those actions may help the participant to cool down. If the participant is unable to eat, offer them a nutritional drink to help them stay healthy.

Assess the participants needs & provide them with the appropriate supplies.

SAFER SMOKING KITS a harm reduction guide

Harm reduction exists no matter which route of administration you choose. We all know we need sterile rigs, but there are ways to be smart about smoking, too! To prevent the spread of bloodborne pathogens like hepatitis C, follow this easy guide to stay safe!



ORAL HYGIENE

Sugar-free gum containing Xylitol will help keep saliva production up & prevent your teeth from decaying.

Chapstick will help heal and protect your lips from cracks & burns.



CLEANING SUPPLIES

If you have to share a pipe, use alcohol prep pads to clean off the pipe to prevent the transmission of bacterial infections.

CHORE BOY & WOODEN PUSH STICK

Chore boy holds crack rock in place & is less dangerous than steel wool.

A wooden push stick helps pack the stem firmly in the pipe and can help pack any remaining substance as far into the pipe as possible to prevent losing any of your drug. Metal pushers can chip or cause cracks in the glass stem, which can cause oral sores.

CONDOMS & LUBE

Safe sex is the best sex. We include condoms & lube in these kits in case smoking gets you hot & bothered.

Use condoms to prevent pregnancy and the spread of STIs, & lube to minimize friction during sex. Rough sex can lead to more easily transmitted diseases through rips & tears.

SAFER SNORTING MATERIALS

In case someone in your crew wants to snort, we want to make sure they're covered, too!



SPARK PLUG RUBBER STEM TIP

A hot stem can burn & crack your lips which can lead to bleeding. Attaching a rubber or plastic mouthpiece at the mouth end of the pipe prevents burns.

HEPATITIS RISK FROM SHARING PIPES

- Studies have shown that people smoking drugs face the risk of contracting the hepatitis C virus if they share pipes that they heat (i.e. crack) with other people. Since hepatitis C is transmitted through blood, people who heat and smoke drugs are at higher risk of transmission.
- Use the supplies in this kit to help maintain good oral hygiene to avoid burns & sores in your mouth, to help prevent the spread of bloodborne pathogens.

SAFER SNORTING KIT

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF SAFELY



STERILE STRAWS FOR SNORTING

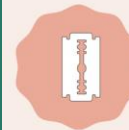
Snorting drugs brings them directly into contact with the lining of your nasal cavity. Drugs can cause blood vessels to rupture, allowing tiny amounts of blood to leak out onto your straw. The transmission of blood can put you at risk of contracting bacterial infections or bloodborne diseases such as hepatitis C. Dollar bills of all denominations can be teeming with germs.

Use the multi-colored straws to help you keep yours separate in a group. These straws are meant to be disposable, but if you need to reuse, only reuse your own! If you don't have a straw, use a Post It.



STERILE SPOON FOR BUMPS

Sometimes we need to take another bump on the move. Use the spoon included in this kit instead of using a key, which could cause bacterial infection.



PLASTIC STERILE RAZOR

Use the plastic razor in the kit to fully crush all drugs into powder. Snorting shards and rocks increase your chance of rupturing blood vessels and contracting bloodborne diseases.



STERILE FLAT SURFACE

Use the plastic card in the kit as a sterile surface off of which to crush and snort your drugs to avoid unnecessary contact with bacteria.

Flushing your nose with warm water after using can keep your nasal cavity healthier by dissolving any residual powder and carrying the drug into your throat so that none of it is wasted.



HOW TO RESPOND TO OVERAMP SYMPTOMS

If someone is experiencing overamp symptoms, stay with them and respond to symptoms as needed. Always check regularly to make sure they are breathing and have a normal pulse.

SAFE SETTING

Move the person to a safe, quiet environment. Clear out the space to reduce feelings of paranoia and anxiety.

CALM THEM DOWN

Engage the person in positive conversation-- tell them that they're going to be okay. Help them walk around if they seem able to do so. If you're indoors, open a nearby window for fresh air. Music, low lighting, and a quiet setting can also help.

COOL THEM OFF

Try to get the person to drink cool water and use ice or cool water on their wrists or forehead to cool them off. A cool wet cloth also works. Put them next to a fan/AC if possible. If you're outside, try to find a shady place.

OTHER THINGS THAT HELP

Food, sleep, and a shower can also help reduce symptoms. Hold their hand or gently rub their neck if they will let you.

HOW TO PREVENT OVERAMPING

KNOW/MANAGE MEDICAL CONDITIONS

Certain conditions like endocarditis or other cardiovascular issues can seriously worsen overamp scenarios. Get a medical check-up to make sure you don't have any preexisting conditions. You'll also receive medication to help manage these problems if needed.

USE IN A SAFE PLACE WITH FRIENDS

Symptoms can be worsened by being with people you don't know or trust, or by using in a place that you don't feel comfortable in.

SWITCH UP THE WAY YOU'RE USING

If you're getting symptoms from speedballing via injection, try smoking or spreading out your shots instead.

TAKE A TEST DOSE

Do a small amount first to gauge the drug's strength. If you don't want to prepare two syringes, you can also sniff a test line.

SLEEP, HYDRATE, AND EAT!

Lack of sleep, water, and nutrition can help trigger and/or worsen symptoms. Try to get 8 hours of sleep, drink a few cups of water, and eat a nutritious meal before using stimulants. If you're not hungry, a smoothie can also help!



OVERAMP SAFETY

VISIT US!

Washington Heights Drop-in Center: 500 W 180th St
East Harlem Drop-in Center: 104-106 E 126th St

HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT OVERAMP SAFETY?

Email us your drug education questions at info@onpointnyc.org

WHAT IS OVERAMPING?

- Overamping is any physical or psychological effect that negatively impacts or endangers an individual due to taking stimulants (e.g., crack or powder cocaine, crystal meth, amphetamines).
- Unlike overdose, overamping isn't necessarily a medical emergency but can just be unpleasant.

WHAT ARE COMMON OVERAMP SIGNS?

- **Physical:** fast heart rate/pulse, high body temperature/overheating, sweating, chills, irregular breathing, passing out, chest pain/tightening, nausea/vomiting, seizure, jerking or rigid limbs, headache, increased blood pressure, teeth grinding, convulsions, and/or tremors.
- **Psychological:** extreme anxiety, panic, hypervigilance, extreme agitation/paranoia, hallucinations, feeling paralyzed while awake, insomnia, delusions, suicidal thoughts, and/or extreme behaviors.

WHEN IS OVERAMPING A MEDICAL PROBLEM?

STROKE

SYMPTOMS

Sudden numbness (especially on one side of the body), trouble speaking/understanding speech, trouble seeing or walking, dizziness, sudden severe headache, uneven facial features.

RESPONSE

Always call 911 if you suspect someone is having a stroke!

SEIZURE

SYMPTOMS

Loss of consciousness/awareness, feeling "fuzzy" or confused, tingling/numbness, forgetfulness, falling, blank stares, convulsions, spasms.

RESPONSE

- 1) Don't restrain the person or put anything in their mouth-- let the spasm happen.
- 2) If possible, place something soft under their head to protect their head and neck.
- 3) Loosen anything around the person's neck (e.g., tie, collar, jewelry).
- 4) Clear the area of any hard/sharp objects to help prevent injury.
- 5) Stay with them and monitor seizure duration.
- 6) **Call 911 if:** 1) the seizure lasts more than 2 minutes, 2) the person is having difficulty breathing/waking up afterward, 3) the person was hurt during the seizure, or 4) the person had a second seizure after the first ended.

AFTER THE SEIZURE

Help them lay in a safe place and, once they're able to speak and understand you, calmly explain to them that they just had a seizure. If the person wants to leave, call a taxi or have someone go with them.

HEART ATTACK

SYMPTOMS

Very fast/irregular pulse, chest pain/tightness, shortness of breath, discomfort in other areas of the upper body, drenching sweat, nausea/vomiting, cold/clammy limbs.

RESPONSE

Always call 911 if you suspect someone is having a heart attack!

SEVERE OVERHEATING AND HEAT STROKE

SYMPTOMS

Nausea/vomiting, headache, dizziness, fatigue, hot and flushed skin, rapid heart rate, dry skin, not sweating.

RESPONSE

- 1) See "Cool them off" (next page) for tips.
- 2) **Call 911 if:** the person is unconscious or showing signs of confusion.

PSYCHOLOGICAL/ BEHAVIORAL EMERGENCIES

Overamping can cause **shock and/or psychosis**, which can be traumatic for an individual. In these cases, the person is not in control and so might **put themselves or others into dangerous situations**.

SYMPTOMS

Delusions, hallucinations, paranoia, suicidal thoughts/behavior, erratic behavior, anxiety, obsessive thinking, disorganized thoughts

RESPONSE

- 1) Carefully direct them to a safe, quiet place.
- 2) See "Calm them down" and "Other things that help" on opposite page for more tips.
- 3) **Call 911 if:** 1) you believe the person may cause harm to themselves or others, 2) if the person is acting strangely in public and you are concerned someone else may see them as a danger- **it's always better to call 911 yourself so you can be in control of the situation!**

Access to harm reduction and treatment

Stimulant-specific resources and support

- *“Law of attraction” or “if you build it they will come”;*
- Culturally-specific outreach efforts;
- Overramping education and resources.

“Twin epidemics” and the interconnectedness between opioids and stimulants^{7,8,9,10}

- Underdosing and lack of access to MOUDs

Policies for harm reduction and treatment

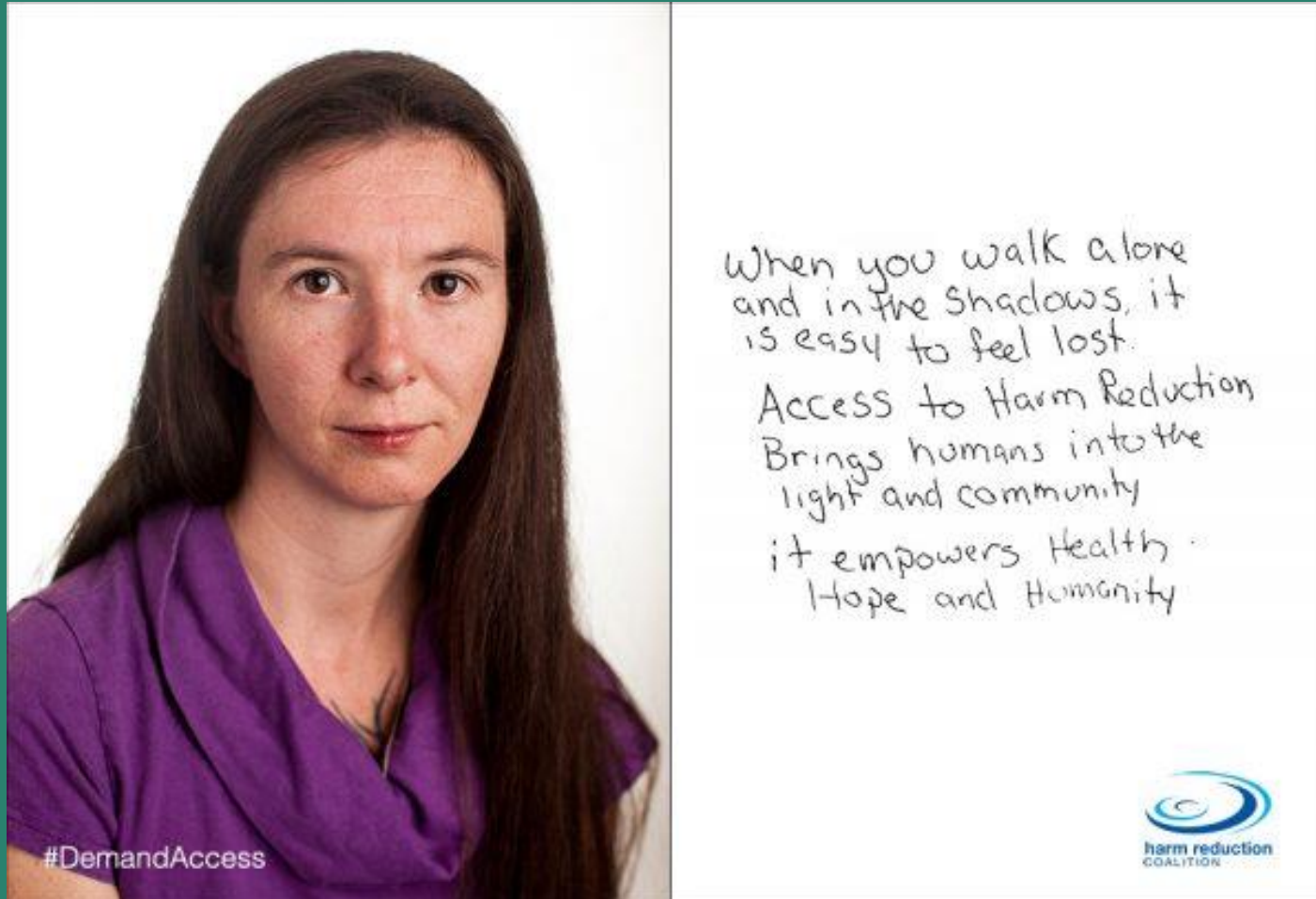
- Decriminalize and fund all drug using and checking equipment/supplies;
 - Safer injecting equipment; Safer smoking equipment; Drug-checking equipment
- Overdose Prevention Centers (Allowing Smoking);
- Expand Evidence-Based Contingency Management;
- Explore safe supply and substitution medications;
- Better protocols for Overamping and Overdose
- Fund stimulant-specific research.

Reduce contact with law enforcement

- Decriminalize drugs;
- Explore regulatory models and safe supply models, including medication options;
- Divest funding from enforcement towards health-promoting options;
- Medical and mental health first responders to emergencies/overdoses; and
- Invest in community-building and response to crisis.

Leading with Harm Reduction

What is Harm Reduction?



“harm reduction is a set of compassionate and pragmatic approaches for reducing harm associated with high-risk behaviors and improving quality of life”

(Marlatt, Larimer, & Witkiewitz, 2012, p. 5)

Why Harm Reduction?

1/3

Thinking beyond binaries – “either/or”

- Drug use occurs on a continuum
- Not all use is problematic – Use is not “abuse”
- Use can vary from drug to drug; day to day
- Harm is relative

Solution-oriented, creative, and nimble

- Drugs carry risk; risks can be reduced
- Many potential areas to intervene and help
- Even occasional and social users can be helped

Why Harm Reduction?

2/3

Redefining help and success

- Bringing people out of the shadows
- “Better is better!”
- “Any positive change”
- “Don’t take away what you can’t replace”
- Retention is the Goal – Keep Coming Back!
- Participant-specific

Why Harm Reduction

3/3

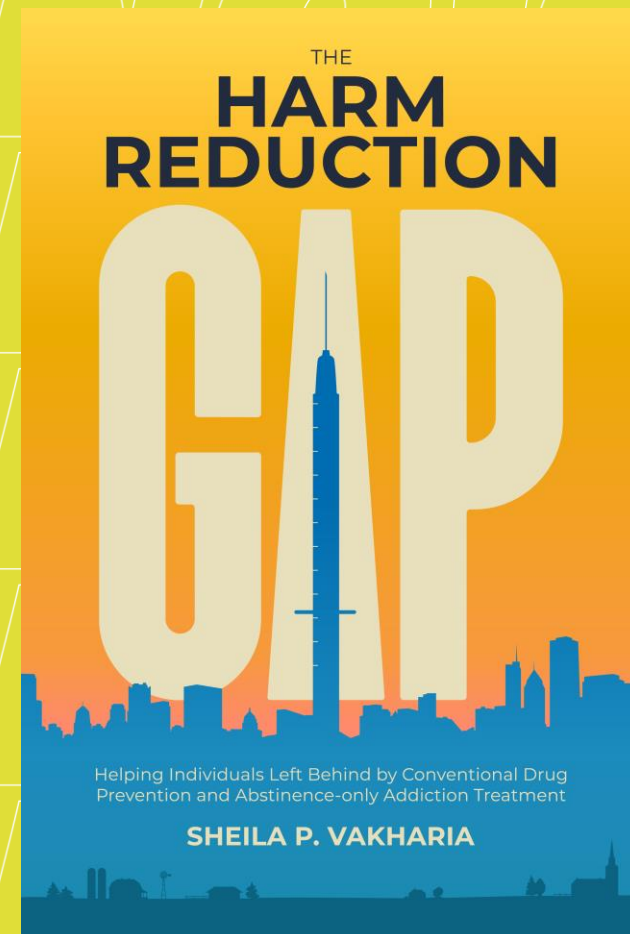
Individualized- no one-size-fits-all approach

- Not everyone is ready, willing, able to abstain
- We need a continuum of services and options
- All options must be available
- Meet people where they are at

Everyone is welcome

- “No one is Disposable”
- “Nothing about us without us”
- Welcoming the unwelcome

The Harm Reduction Gap



Harm Reduction Gap

“Just say no” Drug Prevention

(e.g., DARE, Keepin’ it Real)

What about those who say **“yes”** to legal drugs (e.g., alcohol, nicotine, medications) and/or illegal drugs?

What about those who do not want, need, or seek treatment?

Abstinence-Only Drug Treatment

(e.g., detox, inpatient, OTP, OBAT, outpatient, etc.)

Vakharia, 2024

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THANK YOU