

# Harm Reduction Services for People Who Use Drugs: Exploring Data Collection, Evidence Gaps, and Research Needs

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**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

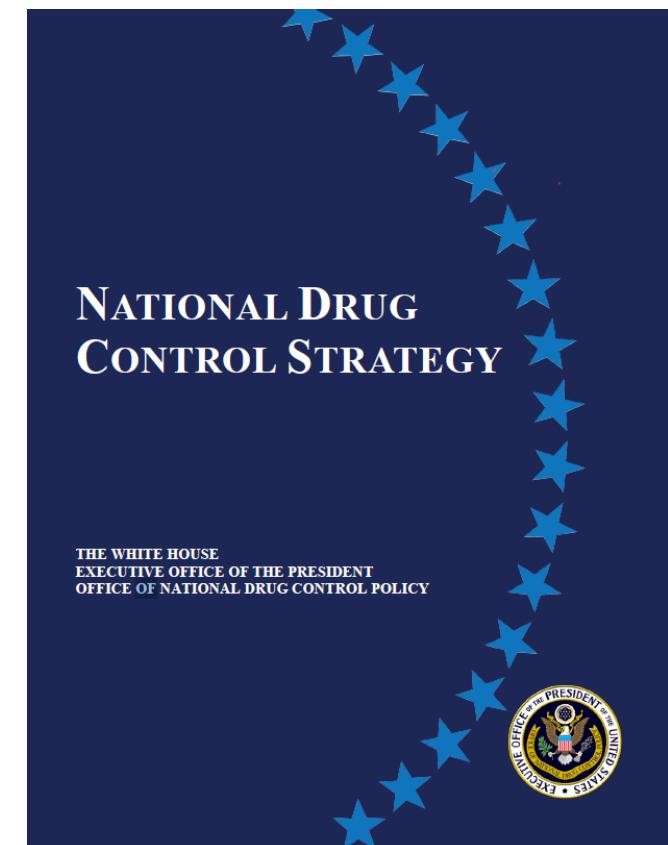
# Guiding Frameworks Embrace Harm Reduction

## HHS Overdose Prevention Strategy

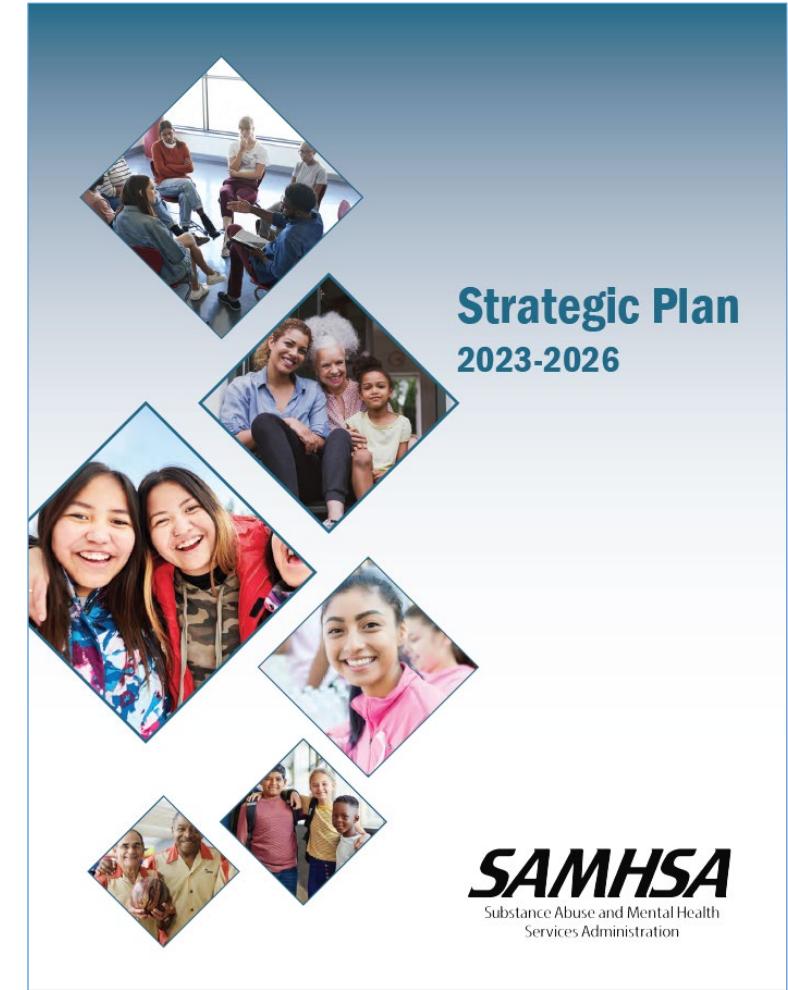
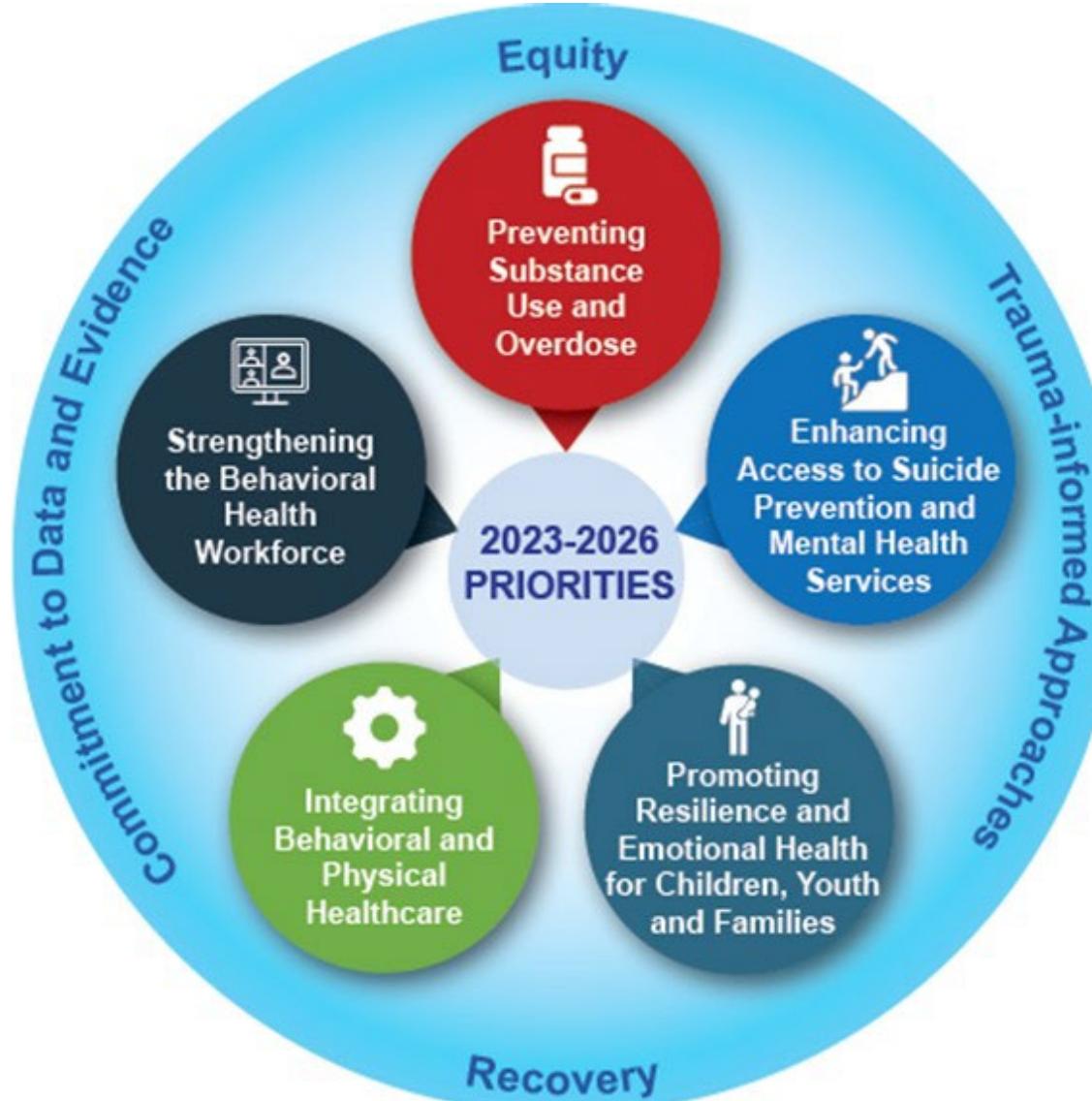


HHS.gov

## White House Strategy



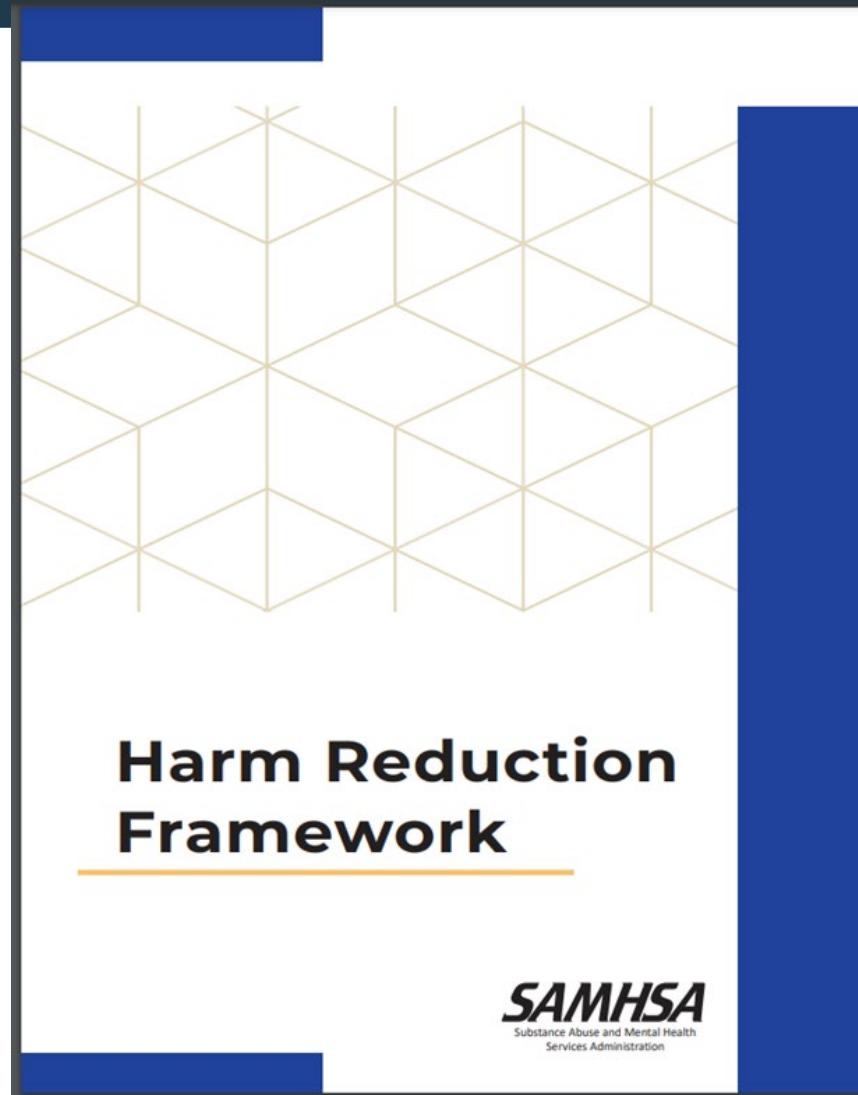
# SAMHSA's Overarching Priority Areas and Guiding Principles



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# SAMHSA's Harm Reduction Framework

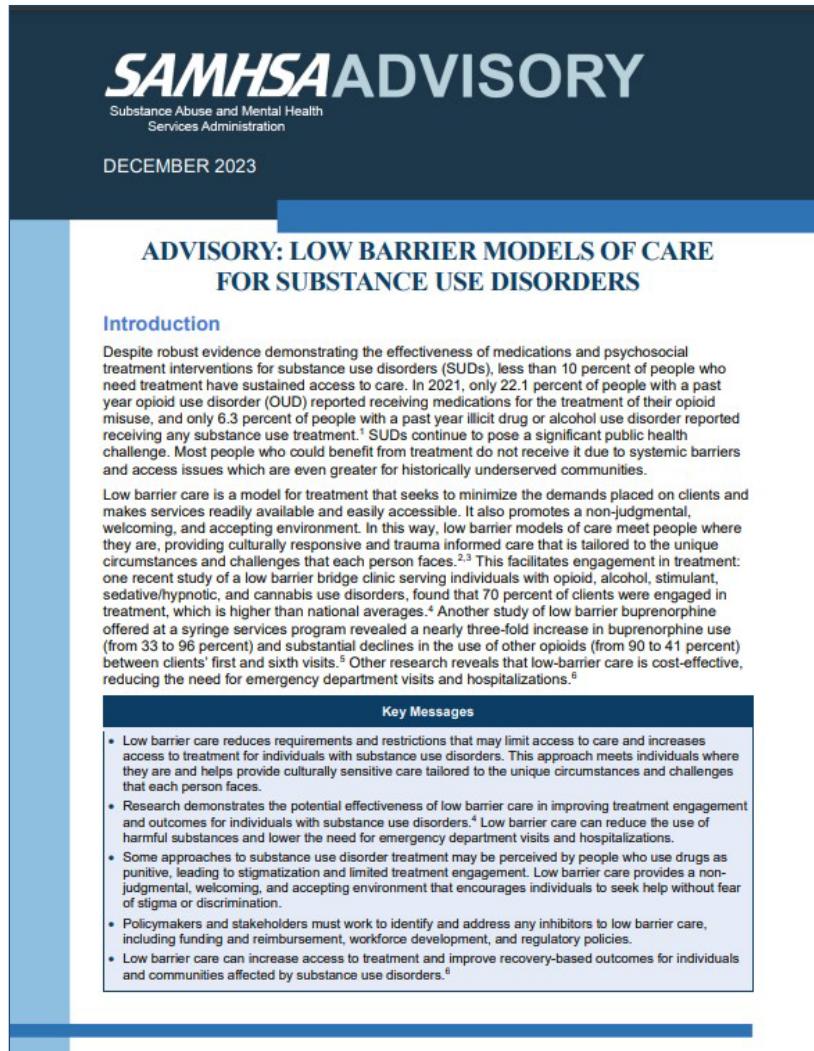


## The Framework

- Provides a roadmap of best practices, principles, and pillars that anyone can apply to their work.
- Serves as a list of best practices and services, with descriptions and citations of evidence.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction/framework>

# SAMHSA Advisory: Low Barrier Models of Care



**SAMHSA ADVISORY**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
DECEMBER 2023

**ADVISORY: LOW BARRIER MODELS OF CARE FOR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS**

**Introduction**

Despite robust evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of medications and psychosocial treatment interventions for substance use disorders (SUDs), less than 10 percent of people who need treatment have sustained access to care. In 2021, only 22.1 percent of people with a past year opioid use disorder (OUD) reported receiving medications for the treatment of their opioid misuse, and only 6.3 percent of people with a past year illicit drug or alcohol use disorder reported receiving any substance use treatment.<sup>1</sup> SUDs continue to pose a significant public health challenge. Most people who could benefit from treatment do not receive it due to systemic barriers and access issues which are even greater for historically underserved communities.

Low barrier care is a model for treatment that seeks to minimize the demands placed on clients and makes services readily available and easily accessible. It also promotes a non-judgmental, welcoming, and accepting environment. In this way, low barrier models of care meet people where they are, providing culturally responsive and trauma informed care that is tailored to the unique circumstances and challenges that each person faces.<sup>2,3</sup> This facilitates engagement in treatment: one recent study of a low barrier bridge clinic serving individuals with opioid, alcohol, stimulant, sedative/hypnotic, and cannabis use disorders, found that 70 percent of clients were engaged in treatment, which is higher than national averages.<sup>4</sup> Another study of low barrier buprenorphine offered at a syringe services program revealed a nearly three-fold increase in buprenorphine use (from 33 to 96 percent) and substantial declines in the use of other opioids (from 90 to 41 percent) between clients' first and sixth visits.<sup>5</sup> Other research reveals that low-barrier care is cost-effective, reducing the need for emergency department visits and hospitalizations.<sup>6</sup>

**Key Messages**

- Low barrier care reduces requirements and restrictions that may limit access to care and increases access to treatment for individuals with substance use disorders. This approach meets individuals where they are and helps provide culturally sensitive care tailored to the unique circumstances and challenges that each person faces.
- Research demonstrates the potential effectiveness of low barrier care in improving treatment engagement and outcomes for individuals with substance use disorders.<sup>4</sup> Low barrier care can reduce the use of harmful substances and lower the need for emergency department visits and hospitalizations.
- Some approaches to substance use disorder treatment may be perceived by people who use drugs as punitive, leading to stigmatization and limited treatment engagement. Low barrier care provides a non-judgmental, welcoming, and accepting environment that encourages individuals to seek help without fear of stigma or discrimination.
- Policymakers and stakeholders must work to identify and address any inhibitors to low barrier care, including funding and reimbursement, workforce development, and regulatory policies.
- Low barrier care can increase access to treatment and improve recovery-based outcomes for individuals and communities affected by substance use disorders.<sup>6</sup>

December 2023,  
SAMHSA published  
an advisory:  
**Low Barrier Models  
of Care for  
Substance Use  
Disorder**

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/advisory-low-barrier-models-of-care-for-substance-use-disorders-pep23-02-00-005.pdf>

# Harm Reduction Activities in SAMHSA Grant Programs

- Harm Reduction Grant Program
- Grants to Prevent Prescription Drug/Opioid Overdose-Related Deaths
- First Responders-Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Grants
- Improving Access to Overdose Treatment
- MAT-Prescription Drug and Opioid Addiction
- Minority AIDS Initiative grants
- Portable Clinical Care Pilot Project



# Naloxone Saturation in the State Opioid Response (SOR) Program

- Required all states and territories to submit Naloxone saturation plans (SOR application as vehicle)
  - Learning Community Jan 2023
  - Policy Academy July 2023
  - Learning collaborative 2024
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Policy Academy April 9-10, 2024
  - Individual state technical assistance
- States innovating to distribute naloxone
  - Lots of questions about how to translate surveillance to implementation



# Thank You!

SAMHSA's mission is to lead public health and service delivery efforts that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse, and provide treatments and supports to foster recovery while ensuring equitable access and better outcomes.

## Grant Opportunities

[www.samhsa.gov/grants](http://www.samhsa.gov/grants)  
[www.grants.gov/web/grants](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants)

## 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Toolkit

[www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit)