



# Harm Reduction in Rural Minnesota: A Collaborative, Community Needs Assessment

Anna Van Deelen, MS, Lucas Kosobuski, PharmD, Anna Marr,  
Laura Palombi, PharmD, MPH, MAT - University of Minnesota - College of Pharmacy

## BACKGROUND

Since 2019, multiple HIV and HCV outbreaks have occurred among people who inject drugs (PWID) in the state of Minnesota, with rural Minnesota and underserved communities experiencing disparities in access to harm reduction, treatment, and recovery services. We conducted a mixed-methods assessment to capture the voice of PWID in rural Minnesota and determine how substance use patterns could inform public health outreach initiatives.

## METHODS

In the summer of 2022, an interagency and interprofessional team conducted a cross-sectional online survey of clients accessing SSP, treatment, and recovery services in rural northern Minnesota. The survey allowed individuals to answer open ended questions on current drug use patterns and preferences, history of drug use, circumstances around the first use of drugs, harm reduction access, patterns of syringe use/re-use and disposal, perceptions of the seriousness of the HIV and HCV outbreaks in the state, and perceptions on the utility of an overdose prevention center (OPC). Consensual Qualitative Research methodology was used to analyze the data.

## RESULTS

A total of 149 individuals completed the survey, representing a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. The majority of respondents used injection drugs and had experience accessing supplies through a syringe services program. Through a quantitative survey and short answer questions, respondents shared their opinion on syringe use, experience with harm reduction services, and their personal and perceived community perceptions of OPCs. The majority of participants had a positive experience with harm reduction organizations and had a positive view of OPCs, however felt that the greater community would be skeptical of an OPC.

## EMERGING THEMES

- Relationships:** Areas that interviewees identified where their relationships and community impacted their drugs
- Associated Emotions:** Emotions that interviews identified as associated with their experience of drug use
- Major Life Event:** Events that individuals interviewees associated with their drug use.
- Harm Reduction Services:** Measure of how many respondents utilized harm reduction services
- Reasons for or against use:** Reasons given by respondents as to why they did or did not use harm reduction services.
- Experience with harm reduction:** General experience with harm reduction services by participants.
- Other sources:** Participant experience with obtaining harm reduction supplies from other sources
- Personal Thoughts on Overdose Prevention Sites:** Respondent opinions on overdose prevention sites
- Community Thoughts on Overdose Prevention Sites:** Respondent opinion on community thoughts about overdose prevention sites
- Syringe Reuse** (Personal Experience and Expectation of others): Number of times that respondents reused personal syringes.
- Shared Syringe Use:** Number of instances that participants shared syringes

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Through quantitative and consensual qualitative analysis, this community needs assessment gathered the views and experiences with substance use and harm reduction services to better understand the needs and priorities of this community and advocate for supportive policies and public health interventions.

## DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST

The authors have no interests to disclose.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge rural and Tribal community partners who made this study possible, including Recovery Alliance Duluth, the Rural AIDS Action Network, and Harm Reduction Sisters.

