

# Facilitators and barriers to accessing harm reduction services in a rural state during COVID-19

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# Acknowledgements

## **Study participants**

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# Disclosures

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# Outline

- **Background**
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusions

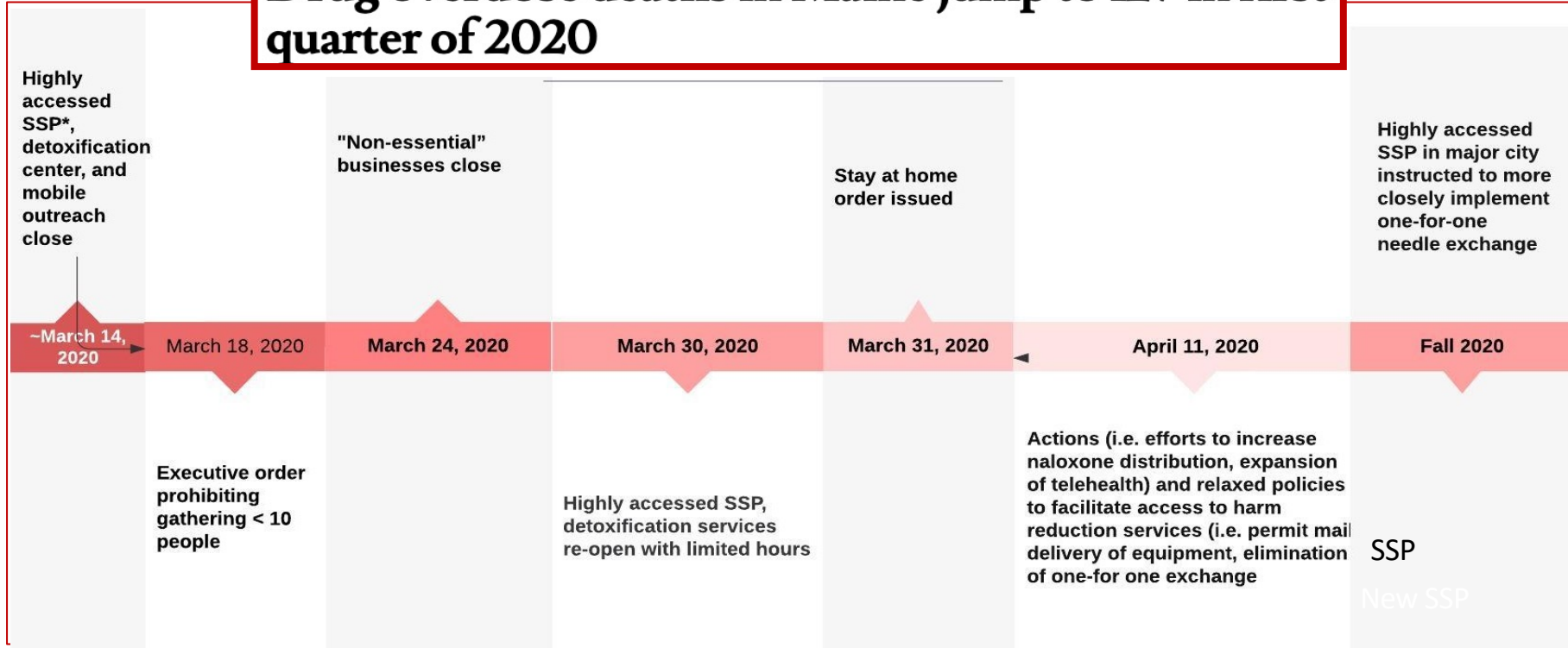


# Barriers to harm reduction service access prior to COVID-19:

- Travel/transportation issues
- Fear of police
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Lack of awareness
- Felt or enacted stigma (from providers or community)
- Distrust of service providers

# Maine at the start of COVID-19

## Drug overdose deaths in Maine jump to 127 in first quarter of 2020



# Methods

- Semi-structured interviews (n=36) with stakeholders, focused on harm reduction service changes during COVID-19, impact on access and health. Interviews conducted between 4/1/2020 and 2/23/2021
  - Providers (n=9)
  - Community Partners (n=9)
  - People who inject drugs (PWID) (n=18)
- Framework method – six dimensions of access
  - Accessibility, availability, acceptability, adequacy, affordability, awareness

Facilitators and barriers to accessing harm reduction services during COVID-19

Facilitators: mobile delivery, eliminating 1-for-1 needle exchange, mail delivery

Barriers: Stigma, 1-for-1 needle exchange, limited service capacity, distance



# 1-to-1 needle exchange policy as a barrier

- *”It wasn’t like this before...It was just like ‘ I want you to be safe...Do you want people safe or do you want health [problems]...There’s going to be a rise in infections and HIV, hepatitis C. Why are we regressing in this now ?*

*(Person who injects drugs)*

# Mailing drug equipment is effective

- *“...the fact that people had to drive three hours each way to access the closest exchange was always an issue. Pre-COVID, post-COVID, whatever. That's just baseline a barrier.*

*Having this...very clear...intervention, "What if we just mail people the things that they need ...?" ...it's pretty transformative.*

*(Community partner, SSP)*

# Mobile outreach

- *“People have been really accessing services that way [mobile delivery]. I think partly just because there's more anonymity. You can kind of show up. You're in, you're out. “*  
*(Community partner, SSP)*

# Take home points and future steps

Several facilitators and barriers to accessing harm reduction services during the COVID-19 pandemic identified

- Key facilitators:
  - Elimination of 1:1 needle exchange
  - Mailing of delivery equipment
  - Mobile outreach



Future steps:

- Continue to share research findings with policymakers
- Partner with community to advocate for improved access

# Thanks

- Questions? [kthakarar@mmc.org](mailto:kthakarar@mmc.org),  @KinnaThakarar

