

# HELP GIVING BEHAVIORS AMONG INDIVIDUALS WHO USE DRUGS IN NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT



Warden C<sup>1</sup>, Jones S<sup>2</sup>, Kil N<sup>2</sup>, Znamierowski, E<sup>2</sup>, Morgan, A<sup>3</sup>, Altice F<sup>2</sup>, Glick S<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Yale New Haven Hospital, <sup>2</sup>Yale School of Medicine, <sup>3</sup>University of Washington School of Medicine

- Background**
- Public discourse and research on people who use drugs (PWUD) often adopts a negative framework with focus on risk behaviors
  - However, research on naloxone distribution programs and drug checking programs suggests that PWUD may routinely provide peers with lifesaving care and support each other in engaging in safer injection practices<sup>a</sup>
  - Syringe services programs (SSPs) are community programs that seek to reduce the harms associated with substance use. In addition to providing sterile syringes, many provide health and social services to PWUD
  - SSPs may offer an opportunity to empower existing networks of care among PWUD

- Methods**
- NEXUS is a cross-sectional survey of PWUD that was administered by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between 06/2021 – 07/2022<sup>b</sup>.
  - Participants were recruited from 6 SSPs in the US. Enrolled participants were invited to refer up to 4 people who used drugs to the survey. Across the 6 sites, total of 1,559 individuals completed the survey
  - Our team analyzed NEXUS data collected in New Haven, Connecticut. 311 individuals completed the survey, 2 were excluded from analysis due to low confidence in responses.
  - Descriptive statistics were performed for demographic information and help-giving behaviors

- Objectives**
- Using the Project Needle Exchange Utilization Survey (NEXUS), estimate the prevalence of help giving behaviors among PWUD in New Haven, CT
  - Inform future harm reduction efforts at a local SSP in New Haven, CT

## Demographics (n = 309)

Age, n (%)	18-39	87 (28.1%)
	40-49	105 (34.0%)
	50 and above	117 (37.8%)
Gender, n (%)	Man	214 (69.3%)
	Woman	90 (29.1%)
	Genderqueer/non-binary	5 (1.6%)
Race, n (%)	American Indian/Alaska Native	6 (1.9%)
	Black/African American	3 (1.0%)
	Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	92 (29.8%)
	White	171 (55.3%)
	More than one or unsure	37 (12.0%)
Hispanic/Latine ethnicity, n (%)		75 (24.3%)
Stably housed, n (%)		193 (62.5%)
Education, n (%)	Less than High School	76 (24.6%)
	12th or GED	156 (50.5%)
	Some college or above	77 (24.9%)
Employment, n (%)	Full or Part time	78 (25.2%)
	Unemployed	231 (74.8%)
Health Conditions, n (%)	History of current or past HCV <sup>1</sup>	152 (49.2%)
	HIV positive <sup>1</sup>	14 (4.5%)
	Injected drugs in the last 6 months	246 (79.6%)
	Overdosed in the last 6 months	108 (35.0%)
Experiences with Healthcare in prior 6 months, n (%)	Seen by healthcare provider	236 (76.4%)
	Experienced discrimination by healthcare providers	100 (32.4%)
	Avoided seeking care due to fear of discrimination	135 (43.7%)
	Engaged in substance use disorder care	174 (56.3%)
	Prescribed medication-assisted treatment	143 (46.3%)

<sup>1</sup> Self reported or positive on point of care testing. <sup>2</sup>116 of 151; total n includes those who both witnessed an overdose and obtained naloxone in last 6 months

## Results

### Harm reduction behaviors

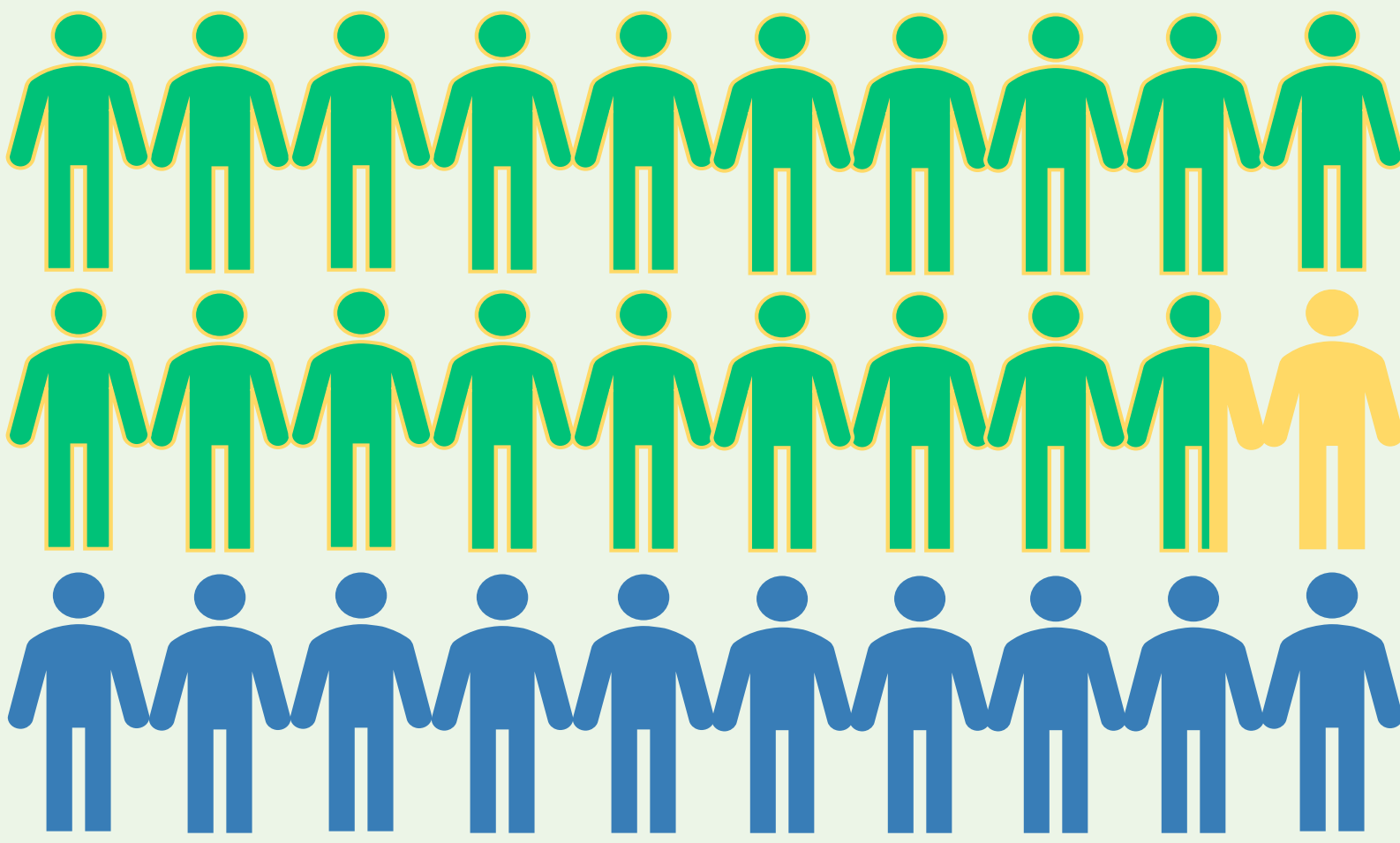


52% (162/309) of individuals received sterile syringes from the SSP in prior 30 days. Of these, 55% (88/162) obtained syringes for others with the intent to distribute or share

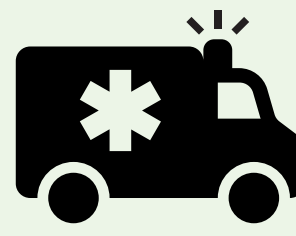


69% (208/309) of individuals reported obtaining naloxone in the prior 6 months

### Aid during overdoses



77% provided naloxone to a peer in need<sup>2</sup>



86% sought medical assistance during last witnessed overdose

66% (206/309) of participants reported witnessing at least one overdose in the prior 6 months  
→ 93% (191/206) of these individuals provided aid on at least one occasion

- Conclusions**
- PWUD in New Haven experience high rates of harm associated with substance use
    - 35% experienced at least one overdose in prior 6 months
    - 49% have a history of current or past HCV
    - 32% reported experiencing discrimination by healthcare providers
  - → Despite experiencing high rates of marginalization, the vast majority of PWUD report help-giving behaviors to their peers
    - 93% of individuals who witnessed a peer overdose reported providing aid on at least one occasion
    - 55% of individuals who obtained sterile syringes at the SSP reported intention to share them

→Empowering and supporting peer and community networks of care among PWUD may reduce the harmful sequela of substance use

→Additional research is needed to understand opportunities to further empower networks of care among PWUD

## Limitations

- This study is insufficiently powered for identification of sociodemographic factors associated with higher rates of helping behaviors
- Survey did not include follow-up questions regarding barriers to giving naloxone to a peer or barriers to calling emergency services

## Acknowledgments

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## References

<sup>a</sup>Bathje GJ, Pillersdorf D, Kacere L, Bigg D. Helping behaviour among people who use drugs: Altruism and mutual aid in a harm reduction program. *J Community Appl Soc Psychol*. 2020; 30: 119–131. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2432>

<sup>b</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV and HCV Infection and Related Behaviors Among Persons Who Use Drugs—6 U.S. Syringe Services Programs, 2021–2022. HIV Surveillance Special Report 33. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/library/reports/hiv-surveillance.html>. Published December 2023.