

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Expand Access to Crucial Harm Reduction Supplies

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TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed legislation (S3957) to expand access to life-saving harm reduction supplies, building on the Administration’s commitment to ending the opioid epidemic through a comprehensive approach. Currently, harm reduction centers in New Jersey may distribute naloxone and other opioid antidotes, fentanyl test strips, and clean syringes. Under the bill signed by Governor Murphy today, they also will be permitted to distribute other harm reduction supplies, enabling them to provide a more comprehensive array of services.

The harm reduction supplies that will now be exempt from criminal penalty when provided by authorized harm reduction centers include any materials or equipment used to prevent death and physical harm, reduce the spread of disease, or mitigate the adverse effects associated with the personal use of controlled dangerous substances. Specifically, the bill clarifies the legality of products such as test strips for xylazine, a sedative for animals that has been increasingly present as an adulterant in the illicit drug supply.

“Harm reduction creates healthier communities while offering a compassionate environment for individuals with substance use disorders to access critical services,” **said Governor Murphy**. “Understanding that harm reduction supplies can prevent fatal overdose and transmission of disease, my Administration continues to include harm reduction as a cornerstone of our strategy to end New Jersey’s opioid epidemic. Through this legislation, we will ensure that Harm Reduction Centers in New Jersey can continue to offer a comprehensive array of services that help people with substance use disorders stay healthy and stay alive.”

“Substance use disorders are a public health matter and need to be recognized as such. Harm reduction supplies are a critical element in the path to recovery,” **said Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin**. “Governor Murphy understands the consequences of the criminalization of the very tools that are helping to save lives. I applaud the Administration and the Legislature for taking pivotal action to ensure that New Jerseyans won’t be penalized for using supplies that will help prevent overdoses and stem the spread of disease.”

“This measure exemplifies evidence-based treatment for substance use disorders; it allows us to use modern medicine and tools to treat people with addiction who deserve compassionate, state-of-the-art care just like the care provided for other chronic illnesses in New Jersey,” **said Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Kaitlan Baston**. “This legislation allows us to be nimble and responsive to the current moment and individual needs. I commend the Legislature and this administration for supporting critical care for people with substance use disorders. This program will enable our expanding network of Harm Reduction Centers and providers to serve their communities more comprehensively. It will save lives.”

“Harm reduction supplies like Naloxone are central to our ongoing efforts to prevent overdoses and save lives,” **said Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. “Harm reduction strategies reduce stigma and allow us to meet people where they are with no judgement. I thank Governor Murphy and the Legislature for this latest action, which supports our work to fight the opioid epidemic and help New Jerseyans struggling with addiction find their way to recovery.”

Sponsors of S3957 include Senator Joseph F. Vitale and Assemblymembers Herb Conaway Jr. Sadaf F. Jaffer, and Shanique Speight.

“Harm reduction supplies and services, including access to clean syringes and test strips, resources for critical services such as HIV care and treatment, as well as Hepatitis C testing, have long proven effective in curbing the spread of blood borne illnesses and reducing overdoses,” **said Senator Joe Vitale, Chair of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee**. “These programs have also shown success in providing a bridge to substance use disorder treatment and other needed services. By decriminalizing harm reduction supplies, this law builds on proven success and practical health care strategies that in the end will save lives.”

“We strongly believe that this legislation will not only help those struggling with addiction but also the families who love them,” **said Assemblyman Conaway**. “In addition to reducing the transmission of blood-borne diseases and cutting down on the number of overdose deaths, making harm reduction supplies legal will also aid drug users seeking assistance with addiction and recovery.”

"No one should have to face addiction and recovery alone," **said Assemblywoman Jaffer**. "By decriminalizing harm reduction supplies and making them more readily available, we are giving New Jersey residents the tools they need to overcome their obstacles in the safest way possible."

"By exempting certain supplies from drug paraphernalia laws, including harm reduction supplies, we are demonstrating our commitment to a more compassionate and understanding approach to substance use issues," **said Assemblywoman Speight**. "Harm reduction advocates and their beneficiaries will no longer face legal jeopardy for supplying or possessing essential harm reduction materials. This legislation recognizes the indispensability of these supplies in curbing the spread of blood-borne illnesses and preventing fatal overdoses."

"Broad access to harm reduction is essential for preventing overdose deaths in New Jersey, and it is vital that residents are able to access naloxone, testing strips, sterile syringes, and other supplies that allow for safer drug use," **said Ami Kachalia, ACLU of New Jersey**. "This legislation is an important first step toward ensuring that New Jerseyans will no longer have to choose between accessing life-saving harm reduction tools and criminalization. The only way to keep New Jerseyans healthy and safe – and to continue to dismantle the devastation of the war on drugs on communities of color – is to respond with evidence-based public health approaches and access to services, not punishment."

"Governor Murphy's decision to sign this legislation is a resounding victory for public health and harm reduction in New Jersey," **said Morgan Thompson, CEO of Prevention Links**. "This move signifies a powerful commitment to making life-saving harm reduction supplies accessible to those who need them most. By exempting these supplies from criminal drug paraphernalia laws, we are taking a bold step forward in our mission to save lives, curtail disease transmission, and provide essential support to individuals experiencing substance use challenges."

"This is a major achievement to move New Jersey towards a compassionate and humane response to drug use, and towards valuing the lives of people who use drugs. We fought so hard for this legislation because being allowed to carry tools that make drug use safer reduces our chances of transmitting HIV and Hepatitis C through sharing needles and pipes, and reduces the stigma that has always told us our drug use is something we should hide or do alone behind closed doors, that we are disposable," **said Caitlin O'Neill (they/them), Drug User Health and Liberation Strategist at New Jersey Harm Reduction Coalition (NJHRC)**. "This new law will reduce overdose deaths and severe bacterial infections and improve drug user health, and is an essential step towards safety and dignity for all people who use drugs. We commend the Murphy Administration and bill sponsors for their leadership in reducing barriers to lifesaving harm reduction tools and treating drug use as an issue of public health and human dignity."

"This bill will allow the Newark Community Street Team's Overdose Response Team and Harm Reduction Center to distribute life-saving, harm-reduction supplies that were previously illegal, which created significant obstacles for our teams who are working tirelessly to save lives," **stated Elizabeth Ruebman, Policy Director of the Newark Community Street Team**. "Make no mistake: fewer New Jerseyans will die thanks to this bill. "

"This new law is a great example of evidence-based policymaking and will go a long way toward reducing overdose deaths and the preventable spread of disease," **said Marleina Ubel, Senior Policy Analyst at New Jersey Policy Perspective (NJPP)**. "Harm reduction supplies literally save lives, and we should be doing everything possible to make them more accessible to anyone who needs them. When we approach drug policy as a matter of public health instead of punishment, we not only reduce stigma but pave the way for more humane and effective responses to substance use. With this law, New Jersey is emerging as a national leader in undoing the harms of the drug war and embracing solutions that center compassion and are proven to work. Thank you, Governor Murphy, and all of the advocates, service providers, and bill sponsors who made this possible."

Governor Phil Murphy

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