

Governor Phil Murphy

# ICYMI: Statewide Overdose Deaths Decline Across All Racial and Ethnic Groups as NJ Health Department Authorizes Harm Reduction Centers in All Counties

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**TRENTON** – For the first time in a decade, preliminary data shows overdose deaths decreased across all racial and ethnic groups in New Jersey from 2022 to 2023. This comes as the State also reached a significant milestone in expanding access to evidence-based care with medication alongside the authorization of Harm Reduction Centers in every county. The Department authorized its 53rd Harm Reduction Center – a dramatic increase from the seven Harm Reduction Centers that were authorized at the start of the Murphy Administration.

According to the [New Jersey State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/ryx4nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/ryx4nbb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/ryx4nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s)), overdose deaths among New Jersey residents declined in 2023 to 2,816, down from 3,171 in 2022, with meaningful reductions across all racial and ethnic groups.

All 21 New Jersey counties are now on track to have [at least one](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/7qy4nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/7qy4nbb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/7qy4nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s)) Harm Reduction Center ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/njz4nbb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/njz4nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s)) to deliver evidence-based care that prevents overdoses and reduces the spread of infections like HIV and Hepatitis C. This approach saves lives and prevents costly hospitalizations.

This expansion of harm reduction services – a key part of New Jersey's all-of-government response to the overdose crisis – is showing results. While any death from overdose is too many, the data show that the Murphy Administration's aggressive strategy of deploying empirically proven and data-driven solutions is working.

"The opioid epidemic has had a devastating impact on our nation, and too many families have suffered its consequences. By paying attention to the data and prioritizing harm reduction strategies over the past seven years, we have built a framework of supports to reduce the harms of substance use, streamline access to treatment, and support families in recovery," **said New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy**. "These strategies are saving lives. I am heartened to see this reduction in overdose deaths, and I look forward to the impact our growing network of Harm Reduction Centers will have as we work to put an end to the opioid crisis in New Jersey."

"Science is guiding our response to the overdose crisis, and the data confirms we're on the right track," **said New Jersey Health Commissioner Kaitlan Baston, MD**. "The reduction in overdose deaths coincides with our expanded harm reduction infrastructure, increased access to medications for opioid use disorder, and broader naloxone distribution. When we follow the evidence rather than ideology, we save lives—and that's exactly what we're seeing in communities across New Jersey."

While recent data are promising, overdose remains a critical public health challenge in New Jersey and across the country. In 2023, more than seven New Jersey residents per day died from overdose. Racial and ethnic disparities in overdose remain unacceptably high; the overdose death rate among non-Hispanic Black residents in 2023 is still twice that of non-Hispanic White residents. Substance use disorders were also the leading cause of pregnancy-associated deaths in New Jersey, driving maternal mortality.

Nationally, in 2023, there were 105,007 overdose deaths in the U.S., according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's \(CDC\) National Center for Health Statistics](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/3b04nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/3b04nbb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/3b04nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s)).

Under Governor Murphy's leadership, New Jersey has implemented an unprecedented, comprehensive strategy to address substance use disorder and reduce overdose deaths.

Since 2022, as part of a series of groundbreaking legal settlements, New Jersey is receiving over \$1 billion from companies that fueled the opioid crisis by aggressively marketing addictive painkillers, downplaying their risks, pressuring doctors to overprescribe, and failing to monitor suspicious activity that led to millions of diverted pills flooding communities across New Jersey and the nation. Last year alone, the State invested over \$120 million of those settlement payments into programs to address the opioid crisis, including \$24 million specifically dedicated to expanding the State's harm reduction infrastructure, and \$28.5 million dedicated to the expansion of access to medications for treatment.

In January 2024, [Governor Murphy signed legislation](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/j404nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s) ([https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/j404nbb\\_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://t.e2ma.net/click/jwms2m/nrddit/j404nbb_!!J30X0ZrnC1oQtbA!!K979fRBkXoapJ3J2XskzoE6gwtEwQZw0LV0hs62maAiATBLYAVsoXsZqdyMPEgFbIOFkUx5s)) to expand access to additional life-saving harm reduction supplies. Previously, Harm Reduction Centers in New Jersey could distribute naloxone and other opioid antidotes, fentanyl test strips, and sterile syringes. Under the new law, they are also permitted to distribute other harm reduction supplies, including materials to test for xylazine, a dangerous adulterant increasingly found in the drug supply.

Harm Reduction Centers are community-based programs that offer a safe, trauma-informed, non-stigmatizing space for people who use drugs to access naloxone, sterile syringes, and other safer use supplies. They also facilitate safe disposal of used syringes and provide access or referral to wraparound services, such as medications for opioid use disorder, health care, and help addressing basic needs.

Currently, 30 sites are actively operating, including fixed, mobile, and mail-based services, with another 23 sites authorized to open. In 2024, nearly three times as many clients were served by Harm Reduction Centers in New Jersey each month, compared to 2023. Preliminary 2024 data show nearly 5,808 people received help from Harm Reduction Centers, compared to 2,866 people served in all of 2023.

The Murphy Administration has simultaneously transformed access to treatment by removing barriers to Medications for Addiction Treatment (MAT). Research shows that patients receiving medication for opioid use disorder have a substantially reduced risk of overdose, making it essential for the treatment of this chronic condition.

Key policy changes include eliminating burdensome requirements that limited access to MAT, creating enhanced Medicaid reimbursements for office-based addiction treatment, and authorizing paramedics to administer buprenorphine. Last month, Commissioner Baston signed an Executive Directive that expands paramedics' scope of practice to provide buprenorphine in the field beyond just immediately after emergency naloxone. They can now treat opioid use disorder or opioid withdrawal with medication, starting treatment immediately, in the moment people need it most.

The State has also revolutionized naloxone access through programs like Naloxone365, which provides free naloxone anonymously to any New Jersey resident ages 14 years and older at over 700 pharmacies across New Jersey. The Naloxone DIRECT program operated by the Department of Human Services has also supplied life-saving naloxone to over 1,400 entities.

While the toll of overdose deaths remains significant, New Jersey's sustained investment in harm reduction and continued expansion of evidence-based programs positions the State to save more lives and lead the way in innovative approaches to meeting this public health challenge.

*The New Jersey Department of Health is a nationally accredited health department working to ensure that all New Jerseyans live long, healthy lives and reach their fullest potential. With more than 5,500 employees, the Department serves to protect the public's health, promote healthy communities, and continue to improve the quality of health care in New Jersey.*

Governor Phil Murphy

[Home \(/governor/\)](#)

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[Governor Phil Murphy \(/governor/admin/about\)](/governor/admin/about)  
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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](/governor/initiatives/#Economy)  
[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](/governor/initiatives/#Education)  
[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](/governor/initiatives/#Environment)  
[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](/governor/initiatives/#Health)  
[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](/governor/initiatives/#Justice)  
[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](/governor/initiatives/#Transportation)

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[Press Releases \(/governor/news/news/562024/approved/news\\_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/news/562024/approved/news_archive.shtml)  
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[Administration Reports \(/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/adminreports/approved/archive.shtml)  
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