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The MA legislature again fails to authorize overdose prevention centers as thousands of Massachusetts residents continue to die each year of preventable overdose.

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At least 14,874 people in MA have died of preventable overdose since overdose prevention center (OPC) legislation was first introduced in 2017. For seven years elected leadership has chosen to ignore evidence, deep need, and demand for OPC causing more people in MA to die of preventable overdose death - and are doing so again. Yesterday afternoon, a Legislative Conference Committee failed to include OPC in proposed substance use disorder legislation (H.5142). **Every overdose death is a policy failure and choice.**

Overdose prevention centers are facilities where people use pre-obtained drugs with sterile supplies under trained supervision. They are proven to reduce fatal overdoses, as well as the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and soft-tissue infections. Over 30 years of data **reveals the tremendous need and impact of OPC** including increased participant access to treatment services, reduced public injection, and that they result in less injection-related litter. **Few interventions have proven to be as effective for reducing overdose deaths as OPC.**

Never before has the need for OPC in MA been more evident. In June of 2024 the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH) released *preliminary data* that shows 2,125 people in MA died of preventable opioid-related overdose in 2023. While this is a 10% decrease from the at least 2,335 lives lost to overdose death in 2022. Yet, *among non-Hispanic Black residents, the opioid-related overdose death rate continues to increase year over year*, 4% from 2022-2023 following a 42% rise from 2021 to 2022. This rise is a stark reminder that the war on drugs is a war on Black and Brown people - and continues to disproportionately target and impact them. We maintain **EVERY life is precious, and every life lost to PREVENTABLE overdose is too many.**

The informed decision by lawmakers to NOT pursue OPC defies *MA DPH's December 2023 feasibility report* recommendations to authorize and implement OPC in MA - citing them as necessary to address the harms of substance use. The report also notes legislation would have removed the final roadblock for municipalities such as Somerville and Worcester, who intend to open OPCs once authorized, to reduce preventable death of their residents.

Since November of 2021, *OnPoint New York has operated the first two City-Sanctioned OPCs* in the United States. *Preliminary reports* from their three years of operation showed 5,804 community members had visited OnPoint 171,712 times, and that staff had reversed nearly 1,696 overdoses. An adjacent playground, previously shut down due to abandoned syringes, has been able to reopen due to the OPC. In Rhode Island, Project Weber / Renew just opened the first state-sanctioned OPC in the United States. **Massachusetts is well overdue to take action to stop preventable overdose deaths!**

Every day that passes without establishing overdose prevention centers in Massachusetts guarantees more people will die a preventable overdose death. We condemn the legislature for their continued information resistance and moralizing of substance use. All evidence and the experiences of people who use drugs, people who care for and love them that a public health and evidence-based response, not criminalization or coercion, is desperately needed to save lives and support the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs, and improve communities across the Commonwealth now. **We demand OPC now!**

Experts and stakeholders from across the Commonwealth offered the following:

Ricardo, unhoused person who uses drugs of Roxbury, Cambridge, and Somerville and member of the Material Aid and Advocacy Program Organizing Group:

I want to do what I need to do in a safe and private place, not in a park where I make people upset but I don't have another choice. They're spending money on cops to move us along or lock us up instead of passing OPC, which would resolve these community challenges. More and more it feels like they don't want to see us survive. I don't have the time for them to realize my life has value; Gary, Johnny, Britt, all our people - I feel like the list of lost loved ones is days long - their lives had value. OPC saves cash, saves calls to EMS, and saves lives. OPC NOW!

Kim Powers, Cape Cod resident and Founder and Executive Director of Access HOPE: It's shameful that the legislature is making decisions based on their personal opinions and bias instead of the evidence. This is the definition of stigma. Stigma kills - we demand OPC now!

Mary Wheeler, Lynn resident: Sam, a beloved community member, just died of an unattended overdose on the street that could have been prevented. It's outrageous, infuriating, and unfortunate that we have to ask again for legislation to value human life, community trauma mitigation, and healthcare over politics. We need OPC now!

Lynn Wencus, Team Sharing member from Wrentham: While the outcome of the SUD bill is not what I had hoped for, I'm grateful that it didn't completely fail. However, the compromise to drop Overdose Prevention Centers from the bill clearly indicates Massachusetts is not a leader in efforts to address the overdose crisis. As a parent of loss, I know there is no compromise when it comes to saving lives. Overdose prevention centers save lives - we need OPC now!

Dr. Alexandra Collins, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Health and Tufts University: I'm disheartened by the continued failure to pass a bill in the MA legislature that would approve OPC. While the compromise bill aims to increase access to supports that are important for responding to the overdose crisis, the bill will not address critical drivers of fatal overdose, such as using alone. OPCs are a critical evidence-based public health intervention that have decades of evidence showing their effectiveness at reducing fatal overdose risk, reducing risk of other health harms, and connecting clients to broader supports. They are key features of a continuum of care for people who use drugs. The plethora of evidence from OPC evaluations across numerous countries is not debatable - these interventions provide health and social supports that people who use drugs deserve. As the local drug supply continues to become more adulterated, people deserve a place where they will be safe and overdose prevention centers offer that.

Mark Jachym, Westfield resident: When it comes to substance use, Massachusetts claims to be a state without stigma. However, they continue to show us it's nothing more than a slogan. The House once again failed to support OPC, which implies they don't care about us losing our friends and family to a very preventable death. Without OPC, our cities will continue to have people forced to use them publicly, many dying alone.

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ABOUT SIFMA Now!: SIFMA Now! is the first organization dedicated to authorizing overdose prevention centers in MA and has been advocating for the opening of OPC since 2016. We are a grassroots coalition of people who use or used drugs, people who have lost loved ones to preventable overdose, harm reductionists, healthcare professionals, attorneys, researchers, students (medical, public health, legal), and community members. We know that only an evidence-based, public-health, and harm reduction approach will stem the tide of preventable overdose deaths and worked in partnership with legislators to introduce the first OPC bills in Massachusetts in 2017. Since then, we haven't stopped organizing, advocating, and agitating for the passage of OPC. Every overdose death is a policy failure and choice - SIFMA Now!

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: SIFMA Now! strongly recommends less stigmatizing language such as that proposed by [Changing the Narrative](#).