

Overdose Prevention Centers: Frequently Asked Questions



What are overdose prevention centers (OPCs)?

- OPCs are places where people can safely use previously obtained drugs under the supervision of trained staff. There are two OPCs currently operating in New York City (NYC) — one in East Harlem and one in Washington Heights.
- OPCs reduce the risk of harms related to drug use, including fatal overdose, and provide health services to people who use drugs.

Are OPCs effective?

- Yes. OPC services are a proven public health intervention to prevent overdose deaths.
- More than 100 OPCs are in operation in more than 60 jurisdictions around the world.
- No person has died of an overdose at any OPC in more than 30 years of operations.
- A Health Department feasibility study* found that opening four OPCs in NYC would save up to 130 lives and \$7 million in direct health care costs per year.

How do OPCs promote the health of people who use drugs?

- OPC staff prevent overdose risks by intervening as soon as symptoms of a potential overdose appear.
- OPCs reduce injection-related illnesses and injuries. They also increase access to health care and referrals to drug treatment.

How do OPCs help the community?

- OPCs are a safe and effective way to address the overdose crisis and reduce overdose death.
- OPCs reduce public drug use, syringe litter and drug-related crime in the neighborhoods in which they operate.

Why are OPCs opening now?

- Record-breaking numbers of people in the U.S. and NYC are dying of drug overdoses.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported more than 100,000 U.S. overdose deaths in the 12-month period ending in April 2021.
- In 2020, more than 2,000 people died of an overdose in NYC, the highest number since reporting began in 2000.

* New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Overdose prevention in New York City: supervised injection as a strategy to reduce opioid overdose and public injection. 2018.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/public/supervised-injection-report.pdf>

Where are NYC's two OPCs located?

- The OPCs in East Harlem and Washington Heights are within existing syringe service programs (SSPs) that have long histories of providing services in their communities. For more information about SSPs, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **alcohol and drug use services**.
- More OPC locations may be opened in the future.

Who can go to an OPC?

- Anyone who currently uses drugs and needs access to OPC services can go to an OPC.
- Like with SSPs, participants complete a short screening and intake process to access OPC services.

Are drugs sold at OPCs?

- No. Drug selling is not allowed in or around OPCs.

Do OPCs encourage or increase drug use?

- No. People are already using drugs. OPCs reduce drug use, lead to safer drug use practices and increase participation in drug treatment services.
- There is no evidence that OPCs encourage people to start using drugs. OPCs serve people who live in the surrounding neighborhood. Research from SSPs show that people generally use services close to where they live and are unlikely to travel far for services.

Who funds OPCs?

- OPC services are privately funded.

For more information about overdose prevention centers, visit nyc.gov/health and search for **alcohol and drug use services**.