

**December 14, 2021**

Dear Legislators,

Despite hard work and dedication from many stakeholders, overdose fatalities continue to accelerate with unprecedented velocity. This upcoming legislative session, we would like to see the State Legislature fully discuss and explore the feasibility of implementing an Overdose Prevention Site, or system of Overdose Prevention Sites, in Vermont.

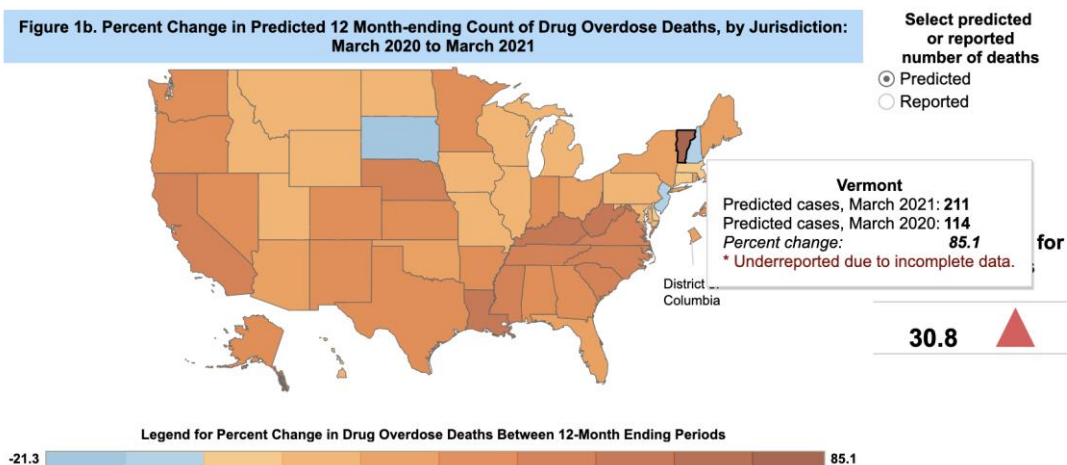
### **Background**

Governor Shumlin's State-of-the-State speech in January of 2014 called our collective attention to the public health crisis related to drug overdose. In 2016, the City of Burlington began hosting Community Stat – monthly, data-driven, rapid action meetings of 50-75 stakeholders – which has pushed for and driven action on important reforms to fight the overdose epidemic. Alongside the Chittenden County Opioid Alliance, some reforms that Community Stat members contributed to have included:

- Eliminating the waiting list for Medically Assisted Treatment at the county level (i.e., an increase in the capacity of Chittenden County's hub as part of the hub and spoke system);
- Rapidly growing the number of primary care physicians treating opioid addiction using medication (i.e., expansion of the spoke capacity);
- Starting a low-barrier buprenorphine program at the UVM Medical Center's Emergency Department;
- Embracing the Howard Center Safe Recovery syringe service program as a trusted place for people with substance use disorders so that they can both obtain clean syringes and also promptly access addiction treatment;
- Decriminalization of possession of small amounts of non-prescribed buprenorphine;
- Distribution of Fentanyl detection strips;
- Strategic placement of Recovery Coaches to engage people who use opioids and other drugs;
- Access to medically assisted treatment for incarcerated Vermonters; and
- "Know OD", an online resource for Vermonters to learn about and prevent drug overdose.

**As a result of fentanyl, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, overdoses and overdose deaths are steeply rising, both nationally and here in Vermont.** This increase has largely been driven by fentanyl and fentanyl laced drugs.

[Provisional data from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics](#) indicates that there were 92,511 deaths from drug overdoses in the 12 month period ending in December 2020, up from 71,130 in the 12 month period ending in December 2019--a national increase of about 30%. The CDC's overdose fatality data shows that *in Vermont, between March 2020 and March 2021, there were 211 overdose fatalities, as compared to 114 for the previous 12- month period. The percentage change was 85%, which is the fastest one year increase by state in the country.*



[A survey of Safe Recovery clients](#) found that among respondents:

- 57% of clients have experienced an overdose;
- 35% of clients have experienced HCV transmission;
- 56% of clients have been to the emergency room due to drug related activity;
- 67% of clients have experienced abscess or injection site infection;
- 88% of clients’ primary route of administration is injection.
- 90% of clients would use an Overdose Prevention Site as part of a syringe service program.

**Overdose Prevention Sites are part of a strong harm reduction strategy**

While our current supports and systems are essential, the crisis is now more acute, and harm reduction and recovery support programs should be broadened and strengthened to save the lives of Vermonters. The State Legislature should dedicate resources to exploring the feasibility of Overdose Prevention Sites in Vermont to be part of a comprehensive and robust strategy to stop overdose deaths.

[A local study](#) by a commission formed by the Chittenden County State’s Attorney, Sarah George, cited numerous positive impacts of Overdose Prevention Sites including a reduction in overdosed deaths, a provision of entry into treatment, reduced risk of transmission of infectious diseases, and improved safe disposal of used syringes. Additionally, the report found that crime did not increase in areas in which OPSs are located and that they were a cost-effective strategy.

As part of her [research to reduce opioid overdose deaths](#), Dr. Ju Nyeong Park, an epidemiologist at Brown University and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, stated that “There are more than 110 OPS in 66 cities worldwide. Evidence on the impacts of OPS demonstrates their significant association with reducing overdose fatalities, HIV and HCV transmission, syringe sharing, public injection, ambulance usage, and crime. Furthermore, OPS increase entry into drug treatment, have never housed a fatal overdose, and have been found to be cost-effective.”

Vermonters with Substance Use Disorder are dying at an unprecedented and accelerating rate, and the need for innovative, data-driven services is clear. Research has shown that Overdose Prevention Sites prevent overdose death and provide other necessary health services.

We urge the State Legislature to explore legal pathways to implement Overdose Prevention Sites in Vermont, and stand ready to assist and continue to advocate on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Ed Baker, **Addiction Recovery Channel**, co-chair of **Overdose Prevention Site committee of Community Stat**  
Jay Diaz, **American Civil Liberties Union of Vermont**  
Andrew Seaman, **Better Life Partners**  
Councilor Karen Paul and Councilor Max Tracy, **City Council of Burlington, VT**  
Mayor Miro Weinberger, **City of Burlington, VT**  
Jeff McKee, **Community Health Centers of Burlington**  
Maura O'Neil, **Community Stat Member**  
Joyce Cameron, **Community Stat Member**  
Dana Poverman, **Community Stat Member**  
Catherine Simonson, **Howard Center**  
Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, **NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals**  
Hilary Melton, **Pathways Vermont**  
Catherine Antley, **Physicians, Families, and Friends Education Fund**  
Peter Espenshade and Daniel Franklin, **Recovery Vermont/ VAMHAR**  
Mark Redmond, **Spectrum Youth and Family Services**  
Sarah George, **Chittenden County State's Attorney**  
Kimberly Blake, **Team Sharing Vermont**  
Cam Lauf, **Turning Point Center of Chittenden County**  
Jesse Bridges, **United Way Northwest Vermont**  
William Keithcart, **Vermont Addiction Professionals Association**  
Alex Lehning, **Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement & Innovation**  
Liza Ryan, **Vermont Recovery Advocacy Project**  
Gary De Carolis, **Vermont Recovery Network**  
Tom Dalton, **Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform**