

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Harm Reduction

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2023

Approved by the Assembly, November 2023

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Substance use disorder (addiction) is a chronic, remitting-recurring medical disorder. A core, evidence-based principle of substance use disorder treatment is to reduce the harms of substance use (harm reduction). The implementation of harm reduction strategies reduces the spread of infection, decreases the potential for serious or fatal overdose, provides mechanisms for care of patients experiencing substance-related medical emergencies, increases opportunities to engage patients in treatment and care, and represents a cost-effective public health intervention. Despite a substantial evidence base for the effectiveness of harm reduction, the legality of, patient access to, and training opportunities for harm reduction approaches remain inconsistent and underutilized. In the current era of high rates of fatal substance poisonings and other substance-related morbidity, it is critical to ensure that economic, legislative, and other barriers to these effective public health interventions are decreased so they can be as widely utilized as possible.

APA supports:

- 1. Policy, legislation, and funding to enhance the adoption of harm-reduction interventions including, but not limited to, drug-checking services, overdose prevention centers, sterile needle/syringe/pipe services, infectious disease testing, availability of overdose reversal agents (e.g., naloxone), medications for addiction treatment, and access to low-threshold treatment.**
- 2. Policy, legislation, and funding that ensures equitable access to the full range of harm reduction interventions for all patients.**
- 3. Increased training in harm reduction practices at all levels of medical training and for all healthcare providers.**
- 4. Policies that support healthcare system uptake of harm reduction strategies.**
- 5. Increased research to identify effective harm reduction modalities.**

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