

NC Opioid Settlement and Vital Strategies Community Harm Reduction Program Co-Funding Proposal

Background:

North Carolina ranks among the top 25 states in the nation in overdose fatalities. These deaths are preventable, and are disproportionately impacting lower income residents, as well as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities. Between 2000 and 2020, North Carolina lost more than 28,000 lives to drug overdose.

Harm reduction programs reach people who use drugs with education, support, and supplies for reducing the risk of disease and overdose. People who inject drugs face unique health concerns such as risk of contracting hepatitis C, HIV, and other preventable illnesses and are at an increased risk of overdose. While this group is currently served by a network of community and government-run syringe service providers in North Carolina, their access to services is in peril due to potential funding interruptions. In addition, community organizations and academic partners in North Carolina report fentanyl presence in drugs that are not injected, and a lack of harm reduction services for BIPOC communities, who are experiencing heightened rates of overdose death both nationwide and in the state. While maintaining existing reach by community syringe services providers is crucial, North Carolina community and government partners must also broaden their reach to ensure harm reduction services are inclusive and equitably benefit BIPOC communities and non-injecting drug users to prevent overdose.

Concept:

Engage county commissioners to fast-track opioid settlement dollars in support of harm reduction initiatives in their counties by matching funding with Vital Strategies contribution. [Vital Strategies Overdose Prevention Initiative](#) launched in North Carolina in 2022 with support from the [Governor's Office](#). Vital Strategies will match county opioid settlement funding to support community-based harm reduction services including syringe service programs and naloxone distribution. Together Vital Strategies and a North Carolina county would co-commit funds to support existing harm reduction service providers and/or to establish new grassroots efforts in areas of high need, including where there is no programming.

Vital Strategies will commit to a co-funding structure, alongside the county, for three years, after which the county commits to continued funding at least 75% of their initial investment, via the opioid settlement dollars. For example, if a county invests \$10,000 into a community-based harm reduction initiative, the initiative will receive \$20,000 through the matched funds with Vital Strategies for the first three years, and the county will continue to fund at least \$7,500 annually towards the initiative through the duration of opioid settlement funding.