



Michigan's Harm Reduction Efforts Save Lives, Prevent Hepatitis C

Harm reduction programs in Michigan have saved lives, prevented hepatitis C cases, reduced hospitalizations and more.

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A [new modeling study](#) by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) found that [harm reduction](#) programs prevented [hepatitis C](#) (HCV) cases, reduced hospitalizations and saved lives.

Harm reduction refers to [public health](#) efforts to reduce the negative impacts of drug use by, for example, preventing overdose deaths and limiting the spread of infections, including HCV. Harm reduction programs supply lifesaving tools like naloxone, which can reverse the effects of opioids and prevent [overdose](#) deaths.

HCV is a contagious but curable disease caused by a virus that infects the liver. It is a blood-borne virus that can cause lifelong infection, liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

Approximately 2.7 million people in the United States are living with chronic HCV, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates. The number of new HCV cases is steadily rising, largely due to the opioid epidemic.

"Harm reduction is a key component of our opioids response in Michigan, and it is working," said MDHHS director Elizabeth Hertel in a [news release](#). "According to the most recent year of data, Michigan ranked in the top five states in the country for greatest reduction in overdose deaths."

MDHHS works with and supports nearly 40 harm reduction agencies with more than 100 locations throughout Michigan.

The analysis of provisional data from earlier in 2025 showed the number of overdose deaths

decreased from 2023 to 2024 by 36%—from 2,931 to 1,877, respectively.

“Our modeling shows that the more we increased investments in harm reduction programming, the more lives we saved, with more than 550 Michigan lives saved in 2024 alone with naloxone,” said chief medical executive for Michigan, Natasha Bagdasarian, MD, MPH. “These are not just statistics, they are our neighbors, our family members and our friends.”

According to the release, Michigan’s expansion of harm reduction efforts from 2017 to 2024 resulted in:

- More than 1,650 deaths prevented due to increased access to naloxone;
- An increase from 135 deaths prevented in 2019 to 569 deaths prevented in 2024;
- More than 4,000 HCV cases avoided through the impacts of Medicaid treatment initiatives like [We Treat Hep C](#) and the expansion of harm reduction agencies;
- An increase from 211 HCV cases averted in 2018 to more than 1,000 cases of HCV prevented in 2024;
- More than 13,000 hospitalizations due to injection drug use prevented between 2018 and 2024;
- An increase from 323 hospitalizations prevented in 2018 to 2,800 hospitalizations prevented in 2024;
- Approximately 13,200 emergency department (ED) visits prevented between 2018 and 2023;
- An increase from 2,521 ED visits prevented in 2021 to 5,300 ED visits prevented in 2024.

These outcomes reflect the positive impact of community-based work supported by MDHHS investments in harm reduction agencies. These local agencies deliver critical prevention and care services.

More than 100 community-based sites throughout the state work to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission and outbreaks by offering tools to prevent the spread of HIV, HCV and other blood-borne infections. From 2018 to 2024, harm reduction agencies provided more than 9,000 HIV and HCV tests and connected people living with these diseases to care, according to the release.

Through Michigan's [Naloxone Direct Portal](#), more than 1.3 million free naloxone kits have been delivered statewide. With those kits, nearly 34,000 overdoses have been reversed.

"Harm reduction agencies are making a measurable, lifesaving impact across Michigan, and MDHHS remains deeply committed to supporting these agencies and the communities they serve," Bagdasarian said.

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