HARM REDUCTION IS HEALTHCARE: A LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

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BACKGROUND

- Punitive drug policy & criminalization create, sustain, & amplify drug-related harms
- Healthcare workers (HCWs) care for individuals with downstream manifestations of regressive drug policy & the War on Drugs
- HCWs can counter War on Drugs & advance harm reduction approaches via legislative advocacy, but may lack experience
- Based on experiences as med students, organizers, & Overdose Prevention Center (OPC) volunteers, we created a toolkit to support HCW advocacy efforts

CASE

- First sanctioned OPCs in US (NYC): lack protection from criminal prosecution & face challenges from federal government
- Joined grassroots orgs lobbying for NY State bill that would authorize, regulate, fund OPCs
- Emphasized health benefits of OPCs (↓ overdose fatalities, ↓ spread of bloodborne illnesses, ↑ access to treatment)
- Outcomes: legislators' commitments to co-sponsor; built ongoing relationships w/ key players; later, op-ed publication, petitioning

DISCUSSION

- Legislators perceived med students/HCWs to be credible as health professionals, but HCWs must center community-led efforts, amplify voices of those with lived experience
- Grassroots (indirect) lobbying (e.g., op-ed publication) can complement direct lobbying
- Consider framing: promoting health & protecting lives vs. autonomy, justice, rights

TOOLKIT & COMPONENTS

SCAN TO ACCESS TOOLKIT

- PDF with additional linked tools on Google Drive
- Guidance for building a context-responsive platform
- Considerations for tailoring platforms to target legislators
- Customizable email templates, meeting agendas, & literature
- Evidence-based messaging strategies
- Tips for facilitating lobby meetings
- Resources for grassroots lobbying

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the innumerable contributions of organizers, advocates, drug policy experts, healthcare workers, trainees, and people who use drugs, especially: team members and peers of VOCAL-NY, in particular Jasmine Budnella and Steven Gray; the frontline staff of OnPoint, in particular Terrell Jones; Toni Smith of the DPA; the medical student-organizers of NYCASH; Betty Kolod of NYDocs & REACH; and Judy Wessler of CPHS.

DRUG POLICY IS A MAJOR STRUCTURAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS. HEALTHCARE WORKERS MUST ADVOCATE FOR DRUG POLICY REFORM.