

January 30, 2022

**Re: Pass the Opioid Harm Reduction Package to Prevent Overdose Deaths in Oregon**

To Whom It May Concern,

HIV Alliance provides HIV care and prevention in multiple counties in Oregon. We work collaboratively with partners in each county to address the factors that contribute to HIV infections and we provide wrap around services to address social determinants of health for people who are living with HIV. We are the largest provider of syringe exchange services in the Willamette Valley and along with that, we offer harm reduction services designed to prevent overdose and connect folks with substance use disorder to treatment options.

Harm reductions saves lives. HIV Alliance has long aimed to protect the health and public safety of our communities by providing naloxone distribution and training services to eight counties in the state of Oregon. We provide naloxone trainings free of charge to anyone who is interested, including police departments, local agencies, community members, and the general public with outreach in some of the most rural communities in our state, including Lane, Douglas, Josephine, Marion, Klamath, Coos, Curry, and Jackson counties. Last fiscal year, we served 4,887 people who inject drugs through our Syringe Exchange services program, and we distributed 25,515 doses of naloxone. Our clients reported reversing 1,089 overdoses using naloxone we distributed.

Additionally, we assemble safer injection kits and safer smoking kits for distribution during our syringe exchanges and when our outreach teams are working in the community. We also distribute fentanyl test strips, when available, as part of our harm reduction endeavors. These efforts work to reduce the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C in Oregon, in addition to helping reduce accidental overdoses. While there is no evidence to support claims that providing access to materials such as syringes or pipes increases drug use, there is evidence that swapping syringes for pipes reduces the risk of fatal overdose. Critically, this package does not decriminalize any equipment that could be used for the distribution and sale of narcotics.

Oregon is in an overdose crisis. OHA reported an 83% increase in overdose deaths in 2021 as compared to 2020. Two out of three Oregonians know someone impacted by substance use disorder. When we lose one person to accidental drug overdose (the leading cause of preventable death in the United States for those under 50), that loss creates ripples and impacts all of us. We have never seen a year when those numbers have gone down and that is why we strongly support this package of reforms.

**We have the opportunity right now to help more Oregonians be prepared with naloxone when they need it most during emergency situations.**

It is critical that the Oregon Legislature continues to build upon the work that has already been done to reduce harm and support Oregonians recovering from substance use disorder by passing the Opioid Harm Reduction package. Thank you for your time in reviewing this, and what you are doing to move Oregon forward with harm reduction services.

Sincerely,

HIV Alliance