



The Role of Peers in Opioid Overdose Prevention

Catching Up With COSSAP, April 2022

According to the [National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics](#), from March 2020 to March 2021, 96,779 people lost their lives to a drug overdose in the United States. As the number of opioid overdose deaths continues to rise, peers have proven essential in preventing opioid overdose. Research shows that long-term recovery may require more than treatment alone. Peers offer support to individuals who struggle with opioid use and may or may not be in recovery. Organizations across the country use peers to administer naloxone, provide free community training about opioid overdose prevention, and more. [Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program \(COSSAP\)](#) grantees are also leveraging the valuable work of peers to prevent opioid overdose in their communities.

Regional Overdose Prevention Specialists—Tennessee

In Tennessee, there are 20 regional overdose prevention specialists (ROPS) located across the state. They provide training and education on opioid overdose and overdose prevention through the distribution and administration of naloxone. More than 206,000 units of naloxone were distributed statewide by ROPS between October 2017 and June 2021, saving approximately 26,000 lives. ROPS come from many different backgrounds: peer nurses in recovery, paramedics, and certified peer recovery specialists. ROPS' training efforts focus on harm reduction, stigma, and public awareness. They also provide training to first responders, individuals at high risk of overdose and their families, agencies, organizations that provide treatment and recovery services or community resources, and any other interested community members.

Project HOPE—Alaska

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) launched Project HOPE in 2017. An overdose response program, Project HOPE delivers overdose education and training on peer-administered naloxone to interested community members. The program partners with community organizations to offer opioid overdose rescue kit training. Each kit contains two 4-milligram doses of naloxone, a face shield, latex gloves, instructions, and additional resources. The program allows for naloxone to be available for administration by the general public without prescription through a medical standing order approved in February 2017 by the state government.

Rimrock—Montana

Rimrock, a COSSAP grantee, is the largest treatment center in the region, providing rehab services for adults with substance use and co-occurring disorders. Rimrock equips its peers and staff members with tools and resources to prevent opioid overdoses, which include naloxone and trainings on how to administer it. They have naloxone kits on-site that are easily available on the walls. Rimrock has a state contract that provides the naloxone kits, and it is required to document who has received a dose of naloxone.

Rimrock also has peer specialists on its homeless outreach team, which is embedded in the Billings Police Department. They connect potential clients with inpatient treatment services and enroll them into sober living homes. Rimrock has also partnered with Riverstone Health, a health services provider in Montana, to develop the Health Care for the Homeless Team, by which a person

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who is identified as needing naloxone is given access to it by Riverstone Health. Rimrock also has a peer specialist assigned to the local county jail who provides incarcerated individuals with resources to reduce their risk of overdosing once they have been released. Rimrock also has peer specialists within the local hospital and emergency departments working with people struggling with stimulant, opioid, or alcohol use disorders. Since the hospitals are extremely overburdened due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they rely on peer specialists' assistance.

For Rimrock, naloxone has proven to be the most effective way to prevent opioid-related deaths. [This link](#) provides a 15-minute training on naloxone administration produced by the Tennessee government for the general public, a self-assessment, and a certificate of completion. The integration of peers into opioid overdose prevention is pivotal in saving lives by providing community training about prevention, administering naloxone, and facilitating treatment for those who need it.

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