



# Community Paramedics in North Carolina Offer “Bridge to Treatment” Following Overdose

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Some forward-thinking  
emergency medical  
services (EMS) agencies  
in North Carolina have

expanded their services to overdose patients. In addition to responding to and transporting patients in medical emergencies, these ambulance services have developed community paramedic programs to assist patients with substance use disorder (SUD) as well as other chronic conditions. Community paramedic programs provide services not traditionally seen in EMS, such as expanded protocols that enable technicians to treat chronic illnesses in the home. One of the most important services some now offer is medication-assisted treatment (MAT) to prevent patients from suffering withdrawal symptoms while awaiting treatment, otherwise known as the Bridge to Treatment or, simply, the Bridge Program. Two of the first countywide EMS to offer the Bridge to Treatment are featured on the following pages.



## Stanly County EMS

Stanly County, North Carolina, with a population of approximately 66,000 residents, had experienced one of the highest rates of opioid overdose deaths in the state prior to the inception of the Bridge Program in 2019. The community paramedics of Stanly County EMS address this problem with prevention efforts and harm reduction initiatives and by connecting overdose patients to care. They participate in community naloxone distribution, leave naloxone kits and bag valve masks with overdose patients, and provide training on how to use the lifesaving devices. While staffing a weekly needle exchange program, they build relationships with the addiction community. A community paramedic, along with a peer support specialist, follows up with every overdose call to encourage the person to enter treatment and to offer MAT. The paramedic’s ability to administer Suboxone to patients at home until they can enter treatment is crucial to the program’s success. For more information, contact Deputy Chief Mike Campbell at [campbell@stanlycountync.gov](mailto:campbell@stanlycountync.gov).



## Onslow County EMS

On the coast and home to the Marine Corps Base Camp LeJeune, Onslow County, North Carolina, has a population of approximately 206,000. With its community paramedic program, Onslow County EMS is bridging the gap for individuals with SUD. During the first 9 months of 2022, Onslow County EMS responded to 490 overdoses; 412 of those calls resulted in follow-up visits from its community paramedic program. Of the overdose calls, 183 were isolated narcotic overdoses. A total of 97 patients were offered MAT by the community paramedics, and 35 accepted. (Because of the Suboxone shortage in early August 2022, they had to turn away 23 patients.) All 35 patients completed the MAT program and entered a substance use treatment program. Community

paramedics maintained contact with the patients for 30 days after completion of inpatient treatment. No deaths occurred among the 35 patients who completed the MAT program. For more information, contact Chief Jason Jones at [Jason\\_jones@onslowcountync.gov](mailto:Jason_jones@onslowcountync.gov)

## Conclusion

The Bridge to Treatment program that North Carolina's EMS agencies are beginning to offer through their community paramedic programs demonstrates how EMS agencies can offer long-term recovery options for those with SUD. Ten more countywide EMS agencies have been funded by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services to offer the Bridge Program in 2023.

Visit the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) Resource Center (transitioning in the next few months to the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program [COSSUP]) at [www.cossapresources.org](http://www.cossapresources.org).

## About COSSUP

COSSAP is transitioning to the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP). This change in title for the program is indicative of efforts to reduce the stigma related to substance use and to support impacted people in their recovery journey.

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