

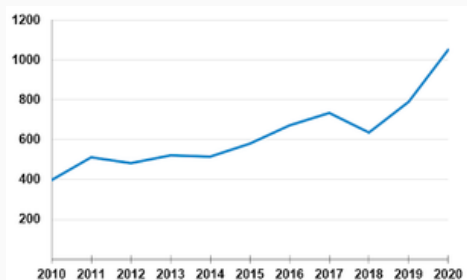
An Introduction from Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity:

# IMPROVING ACCESS & OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS



Current drug policy has ***failed to decrease drug use, exacerbated health problems,*** and led to ***significant disparities,*** including the following:

**Overdose deaths increasing:** Since 2010, overdose deaths have more than doubled in MN



CDC data: Click image to view

**High number of arrests:** In 2020 alone, 12,417 Minnesotans were arrested for drug possession.



MN Dept of Public Safety: Click image to view



Click image to read about some of the health impacts

**Criminal penalties harm health:** Arrests and resulting convictions, incarceration, and criminal record have ***a negative and lasting impact*** on health and create barriers to essential resources and support like housing, employment, and public benefits. ***These harms have a ripple and compounding effect*** on families and communities.

**Disparate impact on people of color:** There aren't big differences in who uses drugs, but there is a significant difference in impact: People of color, particularly Black and Indigenous communities are much more likely to ***overdose***, be ***arrested***, be ***convicted***, and be ***incarcerated*** for drug use than white Minnesotans.

## How criminalization harms health:

### **Increased overdose risk:**

Overdose is the leading cause of death after incarceration. Risk is especially high early after release.

Source: [Journal of Drug and Alcohol Dependence](#)

### **Reduced likelihood of recovery:**

Stigma, discrimination, poor mental health, and chronic economic hardship increase risk of drug use and interfere with access to treatment.

Source: [The Lancet](#)

### **Disrupts social drivers of health:**

Eliminates access to resources/ supports needed to live a healthy life

Source: [Annals of Medicine](#)

### **Harms wellbeing of partners and children:**

Reduced household income and parental involvement, and psychosocial stress increase risk of negative health outcomes

Source: [The Lancet](#)



# DRUG DECRIMINALIZATION & HARM REDUCTION

## DECRIMINALIZE DRUG POSSESSION:

Reducing or removing criminal penalties for low-level drug offenses would give people a chance at recovery.

### BENEFITS



- Reduce arrests and incarceration and their wide-ranging, debilitating consequences



- Redirect resources from criminal justice system cost savings to health systems



- Increase uptake into drug treatment from reducing stigma and potential harms of seeking and accessing care



- Diminish unjust racial disparities in drug law enforcement and sentencing, incarceration and related health outcomes

## RESOURCES



▶ [Minnesota Medical Association FAQ on Policy on Decriminalization of Drug Possession:](https://www.mnmed.org/application/files/5516/7399/4557/MM_A_FAQ_DecrimDrugPossession_2023.pdf)  
[https://www.mnmed.org/application/files/5516/7399/4557/MM\\_A\\_FAQ\\_DecrimDrugPossession\\_2023.pdf](https://www.mnmed.org/application/files/5516/7399/4557/MM_A_FAQ_DecrimDrugPossession_2023.pdf)

▶ [National Harm Reduction Coalition's evidence-based harm reduction strategies and practices:](https://harmreduction.org)  
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## HARM REDUCTION:

Practical strategies to promote the health and dignity of people affected by drug use and reduce negative impacts.

### **Examples:**

Syringe exchanges | Education on injection | Overdose Prevention Sites

### BENEFITS



- Save lives by reducing overdose risks
- Decrease infection spread, like Hep C, HIV, etc.



- Allow time for someone to become stable
- Improve access to information and treatment
- Decrease justice system consequences

