

S1.02 Applying Harm Reduction Principles in Homeless Services

2025 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
ENDING HOMELESSNESS



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Harm reduction keeps people safe and connected to larger social support networks. This aligns with the mission of homeless service providers, and it should overlap in the work we do at the community level. Come to this spotlight session to learn about practical ways to engage harm reduction strategies in interactions with clients and engage in discussion on how to connect clients to larger recovery or supportive services when they express interest.



Harm Reduction

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What is Harm Reduction?

A set of **practical strategies** and **ideas** aimed at reducing negative **consequences** associated with behaviors



Core Principles of Harm Reduction

- Client choice and autonomy
- Low-barrier access to services
- Incremental change
- Housing First Alignment
- Respect and non-judgment

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Harm Reduction In Action

Low-Barrier Shelters

Description: Shelters that minimize entry requirements (e.g., sobriety, ID, background checks).

Harm Reduced: Reduces risk of people sleeping outdoors in unsafe conditions; increases access to warmth, food, and sanitation.

Sanitation Access

Description: Portable toilets, handwashing stations, and showers made available in encampments or outreach programs.

Harm Reduced: Reduces disease transmission, improves dignity and hygiene.

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More Harm Reduction In Action

Housing First Programs

Description: Provides permanent housing without preconditions (e.g., sobriety, psychiatric treatment).

Harm Reduced: Reduces mortality, improves mental health, and increases housing stability by removing barriers to access.

Outreach Workers Distributing Condoms

Description: Normalizes safer sex practices and makes preventive health resources more accessible

Harm Reduced: Reduces STIs and unplanned pregnancies

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Harm Reduction: What It's NOT

It is NOT enabling

It is NOT a free-for-all

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From Compliance to Compassion

If we want people to stay housed, survive, and thrive, we must stop asking for perfection as a condition of care.

What is one practice in your program that could shift toward a harm reduction approach



Resources

- 🛠️ **GENERAL HARM REDUCTION RESOURCES**
- **1. National Harm Reduction Coalition (NHRC)**
- **Website:** harmreduction.org
- **Resources:** Training, toolkits, policy advocacy, overdose prevention, syringe access, sexual health resources.
- **Best For:** Organizations and advocates implementing harm reduction principles.
- **2. Harm Reduction International**
- **Website:** harmreduction.org
- **Resources:** Global policy and data, peer-reviewed research, evidence-based harm reduction strategies.
- **Best For:** Researchers and global health practitioners.

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Resources

-  **SUBSTANCE USE + OVERDOSE PREVENTION**
- **3. NEXT Distro**
- **Website:** nextdistro.org
- **Services:** Mail-based naloxone, sterile syringes, safer use supplies, and education.
- **Best For:** People who use drugs in areas with limited in-person harm reduction services.
- **4. Never Use Alone**
- **Website:** neverusealone.com
- **Service:** National hotline for people who use drugs alone—staff stays on the line and calls EMS in case of overdose.
- **Phone:** 1-800-484-3731



Resources

-  **SEXUAL HEALTH + SAFER SEX**
- **5. Bedsider (by Power to Decide)**
- **Website:** [bedsider.org](https://www.bedsider.org)
- **Resources:** Sexual health education, contraception access, telehealth links, LGBTQ+ inclusive.
- **6. Planned Parenthood**
- **Website:** [plannedparenthood.org](https://www.plannedparenthood.org)
- **Services:** Free or low-cost STI testing, condoms, emergency contraception, and health screenings.
- **Find a Clinic:** Search tool



Resources

- 🧠 **MENTAL HEALTH + CRISIS SUPPORT**
- **7. 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**
- **Website:** 988lifeline.org
- **Phone/Text:** 988
- **Services:** 24/7 confidential mental health crisis support.
- **8. SAMHSA Harm Reduction Grant Program**
- **Website:** samhsa.gov
- **Resources:** Funding opportunities, guidelines, and service models for local harm reduction efforts.



Resources

-  **SERVICES FOR UNHOUSED POPULATIONS**
- **9. National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC)**
- **Website:** nhchc.org
- **Resources:** Policy advocacy, clinical training, toolkits for trauma-informed and harm reduction care.
- **Best For:** Health providers, outreach teams, and shelter staff.
- **10. Street Medicine Institute**
- **Website:** streetmedicine.org
- **Resources:** Best practices for delivering medical care to unsheltered people, mobile outreach toolkits.

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