

PEOPLE WITH ADDICTIONS ARE BEING HIT HARD WITH COVID-19: *IMPLICATIONS AND HELPFUL TIPS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT*



During this critical time, we want to thank law enforcement officials and first responders for their integral work on the front lines. **COVID-19 has had a profound impact on individuals, families and communities challenged by substance use disorders throughout North Carolina.** Physical distancing, abrupt interruptions to employment and addiction treatment services, lack of access to recovery support groups all present critical challenges for individuals seeking either assistance for their substance use disorder, and/or mental illness or those attempting to maintain treatment and recovery supports during this unprecedented time. Addiction Professionals of North Carolina and the North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition have partnered to provide law enforcement with a concrete list of resources to minimize criminal justice involvement and refer people to the treatment and recovery resources that are continuing to operate throughout the state.

WHAT TO EXPECT

➔ *People will...*

Continue to use drugs. Chronic illnesses such as substance use disorders and mental illness do not stop just because of COVID-19. In fact, the symptoms of substance use disorders are compounded by crisis situations involving levels of elevated stress.

Struggle to access their medications. This includes stabilizing medications for mental health disorders and/or substance use disorders that effectively manage cravings and withdrawal symptoms. This premature cessation of medication often leads to behavioral health symptomatology and substance use.

Experience withdrawal symptoms. This is a reality due to disruptions in the availability of alcohol and other drugs, transportation issues accessing drugs, and financial issues. Withdrawal from alcohol can be potentially fatal; while stores remain open, people may struggle to afford it.

Be at a higher risk for an opioid overdose. With disruptions in accessibility to drugs, both legal and illegal, you may see an increase in overdose calls. The ever-present threat of fentanyl may be compounded by this disruption. The harm reduction practice of encouraging people not to use alone (due to risk of overdose) is complicated by the need for social distancing.

➔ *Other Issues To Be Aware Of...*

The homeless population will experience unique challenges.

Problems accessing basic sanitation needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. With the closure of restaurants and public libraries many people who relied on them will have challenges achieving basic sanitation like hand washing. Take note of places with access and/or portable washing stations and share this information with homeless individuals in your communities.

Disbanding or moving tent encampments is not recommended. Disrupting these areas may cause the spread of COVID-19 should it be present. Use social distancing practices and educate the group as to best practices for reducing the spread of COVID-19. Examples include setting up 12 feet apart and not sharing items (see guidance in resource section).

Domestic and family violence calls for service may increase. Vulnerable populations are at high risk for use during stressful times. Being isolated from support systems, living with an abuser, and increased financial worries are all stressors that can lead to drug use. Violence can extend to other family members, such as children.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Use discretion and alternatives to arrest. Jails and judicial systems are operating in a limited capacity to reduce the spread. Not only is there a high risk of transmission within the criminal justice setting, jail staff are woefully unprepared to meet the medical and behavioral health challenges resulting from severe withdrawal symptoms. Individuals exiting jail are at high risk for overdose which greatly increases the likelihood of transmission between emergency responders and patients. Utilize discretion and alternatives to jail for people engaged in low level drug offenses; hand-out treatment provider contact information. Recognize that no matter what stage people are in on their journey to improved health and the reduction of risky behaviors, continued support is needed. In many cases, changes may be gradual; we encourage you to continue positive engagement with the person, especially during times of repeated contact. Practice deescalation techniques where needed.

Keep Yourself Safe!

- › Encourage dispatch to divert non-police related calls to more appropriate resources;
- › Continually sanitize your patrol car and equipment;
- › Stay connected with local resources that can help with quality of life calls;
- › Utilize discretion and/or diversion programming for less serious crimes

Make sure your partnerships are strong and supplies are stocked. This is a good time to check your naloxone supply and coordinate with your local EMS to ensure an organized response. Connect people you meet who are at risk for overdose to your harm reduction partners. If possible, they will distribute naloxone directly to them. We suggest connecting with your domestic violence and sexual assault service providers and victim advocates to determine if their hours/services have changed.

Be prepared for the long run. People who use substances already experience stigma when accessing healthcare. This pandemic will amplify this. Many people with substance use disorders have complex health-related issues which presents a challenge when attempting to access healthcare/treatment facilities that are using health indicators for access. Unfortunately, prior to this pandemic accessing and providing substance use treatment was a growing financial challenge. COVID19 will compound this issue and create even greater financial stressors that affect people's ability to afford care. These challenges can lead to increased involvement in the criminal justice system which can be counterproductive to increasing or maintaining one's quality of life.

As a first responder, your health is vitally important too. It is uncertain how long COVID 19 will affect our individual communities. Stress prevention and management is critical for responders to stay well and balanced. Explore ways to maintain your mental and physical health. See CDC recommendations and the IACP links in the Resource Section.

Prepare for risk due to proximity challenges. Responding to medical calls, including administering naloxone and other life-saving strategies, creates a potential risk for exposure to COVID-19 since you cannot maintain the recommended social distance of six feet. This level of risk is similar to other interactions law enforcement may engage in where close proximity is required, such as taking a report or restraining someone. It is recommended agencies work with their Emergency Medical Services and Fire Department to request their response to as many medical calls as possible as they have quicker access to protective equipment and decontamination options afterwards. Develop guidelines for officer safety precautions should there be a delay in emergency response and lifesaving measures are immediately needed.

WHAT WE ARE DOING

Addiction Professionals of North Carolina (APNC) is operating remotely to support its membership. We've compiled a statewide resource guide with treatment, recovery, mental health and social determinant needs. Please check our social media feeds and website for regular updates. Treatment providers are still seeing patients but in a different way; they are using telemedicine, limited office hours, and phone calls.

The North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) continues to operate outreach services (naloxone distribution, syringe access services and linkage to care) but on a limited basis. Staff are providing these services mobile while practicing social distancing techniques. The state has designated safe syringe programs (SSP) as essential.

The North Carolina Department of Justice works to prevent crime and support law enforcement, to safeguard consumers, and to defend the State, its people, and their constitutional rights. Learn more about how we are working to keep North Carolinians safe during the COVID-19 pandemic at <https://ncdoj.gov/covid19/>.

RESOURCES

North Carolina Partners

The North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC). NCHRC operates 7 safe syringe programs (SSP) throughout North Carolina:

New Hanover County: [910-228-7605](tel:910-228-7605)

Vance County: [252-425-9052](tel:252-425-9052)

Cumberland County: [910-973-7135](tel:910-973-7135)

Franklin/Granville Counties: [919-370-0671](tel:919-370-0671)

Wake/Wayne Counties: [910-228-6090](tel:910-228-6090)

Durham County: [919-370-0671](tel:919-370-0671)

Haywood County: [910-228-0776](tel:910-228-0776)

A list of all registered SSP in North Carolina can be viewed here: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative/syringe-exchange-programs-north>.

Alcohol and Drug Council of North Carolina. ADCNC provides 24/7/365 referrals to treatment providers and other recovery support services throughout the state: [1-800-688-4232](tel:1-800-688-4232)

Managed Care Organizations (MCO)

North Carolina has six MCOs located throughout the state. These entities are tasked with providing healthcare, addiction and mental health treatment for our uninsured individuals. Please utilize these contacts to connect with the appropriate MCO regarding crisis services, addiction/mental health treatment referrals or recovery support services.

VAYA HEALTH

Phone: 828-225-2785

Crisis Line: 800-849-6127

Counties Served:

Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yancey

CARDINAL INNOVATIONS HEALTHCARE

Phone: 704-939-7700

Crisis Line: 800-939-5911

Counties Served:

Alamance, Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Franklin, Granville, Halifax, Mecklenburg, Orange, Rockingham, Person, Rowan, Stanly, Stokes, Union, Vance, Warren

TRILLIUM HEALTH RESOURCES

Phone: 866-998-2597

Crisis Line: 877-685-2415 ***Counties Served:***

Beaufort, Bertie, Brunswick, Camden, Carteret, Chowan, Columbus, Craven, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Hertford, Hyde, Jones, Martin, Nash, New Hanover, Northampton, Onslow, Pamlico, Pasquotank, Pender, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrell, Washington

ALLIANCE HEALTH

Phone: 919-651-8401

Crisis Line: 800-510-9132

Counties Served:

Cumberland, Durham, Johnston, Wake

EASTPOINTE

Phone: 800-913-6109

Crisis Line: 800-913-6109

Counties Served:

Bladen, Dublin, Edgecombe, Greene, Lenoir, Robeson, Sampson, Scotland, Wayne, Wilson

PARTNER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Phone: 704-884-2501

Crisis Line: 888-235-4673

Counties Served:

Burke, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Rutherford, Surry, Yadkin

North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Local domestic violence agencies serve all 100 counties across North Carolina. They offer a variety of services, from 24-hour confidential crisis hotlines to emergency shelter to support groups and counseling. <https://nccadv.org/get-help>

RESOURCES (cont.)

National Guidance

CDC Guidelines On Working With Homeless Populations

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/index.html>

CDC Guidelines For Law Enforcement Around Covid-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-law-enforcement.html>

CDC - Emergency Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/newsletters/epic/013020.htm>

International Association of Chiefs of Police

<https://www.theiacp.org/>

Mutual Aid Group Meetings - NA, AA, ETC

Mutual aid, or 12-step meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous have proven to be essential resources. The meetings often bring recovery and elements of peer support to areas devoid of treatment resources. Please be aware of the following list of online meetings to refer individuals to others who have lived experience of addiction and recovery.

Alcoholics Anonymous

- › [Ongoing COVID updates](#)
- › [Gateway to Online and Telephonic Meetings](#)

Narcotics Anonymous

- › [Gateway to Online and Telephonic Meetings](#)
- › [Gateway to Zoom meetings](#)

AI Anon

- › [Ongoing COVID updates](#)
 - › [Gateway to Online and Telephonic Meetings](#)
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