



House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 11, 2021

House Bill 396
Public Health - Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program
Support

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, third quarter data from the Maryland Department of Health shows a 12% increase in the number of deaths in 2020, over the same period the year before. The numbers were up even before the impact of the pandemic early last year. Maryland must focus on proven effective harm reduction strategies.

One strategy the State has refused to approve is the creation of an Overdose and Infectious Disease Prevention Services Program. NCADD-Maryland supports its creation through House Bill 396. This is a harm reduction strategy whereby people who consume drugs, can do so under clinical supervision. The primary purpose of this is to provide immediate assistance in the case of an overdose.

Along with direct assistance in saving people's lives, these programs, as proposed in HB 396, would also avail people of:

- First aid and care for wounds;
- Sterile syringes and their collection;
- Referral to services for substance use disorders, HIV, hepatitis, sexually transmitted diseases, reproductive health care, and wound care; and
- Education regarding the risk of overdoses and the transmission of various infectious diseases.

There are more than 100 such programs in jurisdictions around the world, and a number of cities in the United States are moving toward establishing them. These kinds of programs have been researched and evaluated for years. Multiple studies show that they reduce the sharing of syringes, and therefore of the transmission of HIV and hepatitis. Research also shows a reduction in overdose deaths, discarded syringes, and an increase in the number of people who enter substance use disorder treatment.

Overdose prevention sites will reduce opioid overdose deaths and begin to address the public health consequences of the crisis. We urge a favorable report on HB 396.

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) is a statewide organization that works to influence public and private policies on addiction, treatment, and recovery, reduce the stigma associated with the disease, and improve the understanding of addictions and the recovery process. We advocate for and with individuals and families who are affected by alcoholism and drug addiction.