



May 8, 2024

Dear Tribal Leader and Urban Indian Organization Leader:

I am writing to provide you with additional information on expanded harm reduction efforts to support our ongoing response to the opioid crisis impacting Tribal communities.

In my letter dated September 22, 2023, I shared updates regarding the Agency's National Response Plan to address the emerging fentanyl and xylazine threat in American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. Enhancing access to harm reduction tools and removing barriers to care is key to saving lives.

The term, "***Harm Reduction***," describes comprehensive strategies deployed by health care professionals to reduce negative effects arising from substance use. Best practices to implement harm reduction focus on acceptance, rather than an expectation that a user will actively practice abstinence. It acknowledges that each person's road to recovery is unique and important, and seeks to mitigate various harms from substance use when people are not yet prepared to commit fully to treatment, or are contemplating behavioral change. These strategies include provision of naloxone and safer use supplies, immunizations, and field screening for sexually transmitted infections.

The following updates summarize the Indian Health Service (IHS) Harm Reduction strategy to date.

Naloxone Safety Net Program

The IHS supports expanded harm reduction activities and works to promote easier access to naloxone. A limited amount of naloxone through the safety net program is available to support Tribal and Urban Indian sites struggling to meet increasing patient requests for naloxone. These medications are meant to augment existing program naloxone forecasting and should be used to fill unexpected shortfalls by programs operated by the IHS, Tribal health programs, and Urban Indian organizations (I/T/U) resulting from increased utilization of naloxone. The shipments are coordinated by IHS Headquarters and delivered directly to customers approved by the IHS National Supply Service Center. If you would like additional information, please email ihslopecommitteeleadership@ihs.gov.

Drug Checking Equipment (Fentanyl and Xylazine Test Strips):

One promising risk reduction strategy includes providing drug checking equipment in the form of test strips to detect the presence of fentanyl and/or xylazine in an individual's drug supply. These test strips, often commonly referred to as fentanyl test strips (FTS), or xylazine test strips (XTS), are disposable, single-use test kits.

On February 26, 2024, the IHS released a Special General Memorandum (SGM) to clarify the requirements for IHS-specific grant funding that may be used by non-Federal grantees to purchase drug checking equipment to prevent unintentional opioid overdose deaths. This SGM specifies that drug checking equipment (including FTS and XTS) can be purchased by non-Federal grantees when consistent with grant-specific purposes and within the scope of a particular grant award, and otherwise allowable pursuant to applicable cost principles.

We are currently conducting a limited pilot program to supply I/T/U sites with FTS and XTS. If you are interested in ordering and providing these items in conjunction with harm reduction services, please submit an IHS-413 form per established requirements. If your health care facilities are interested in creating or expanding a harm reduction program, please evaluate local, state, and/or Tribal paraphernalia laws to ensure awareness of any legal or related restrictions that may impact staff or program participants.

For additional information and harm reduction-specific resources and tools, please visit our website at www.ihs.gov/opioids/harmreduction and the online resources that follow.

- [Fentanyl Test Strips Education](#)
- [Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment](#)
- [Naloxone \(Narcan\) training toolkit](#)
- [Syringe Service resources](#)

Additional Federal resources on harm reduction can be found in the links that follow:

- [Harm Reduction | Drug Overdose | CDC Injury Center](#)
- [Managing Patients Taking Xylazine-Adulterated Opioids in Emergency, Hospital, and Addiction Care Settings | National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) \(nih.gov\)](#)

To stay updated on harm reduction strategies and related topics, please bookmark <http://www.ihs.gov/opioids/news/> or subscribe to the [HOPE Committee list-serv](#).

Thank you for continuing to support strategies that save lives in AI/AN communities. If you have any questions, please contact CDR Samantha Gustafson, Heroin, Opioid and Pain Efforts Committee Harm Reduction Lead, IHS, by email at samantha.gustafson@ihs.gov.

Sincerely,

Roselyn Tso -S

Roselyn Tso
Director

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