



IDENTIFYING BETTER SOLUTIONS AND DRIVING INVESTMENT IN NEW JERSEY

Trenton Health Team (THT) is a community-based organization - proudly based in Trenton, New Jersey and committed to improving the health and well-being of residents in the greater Trenton area.

THT's vision prioritizes providing comprehensive support along with improving social determinants of health such as safe and secure housing and access to healthy and affordable food.

THT used overdose indicators to identify solutions that fit the community they serve.

Trenton Health Team learned from first-hand experiences, generating high-quality data, documenting local barriers to treatment and identifying and implementing more effective solutions.

USING OMM INDICATORS TO IMPROVE EFFORTS



LEARNING FROM OVERDOSE FATALITY REVIEWS

While leading the Mercer County Overdose Fatality Review Team, THT reviewed more than 120 overdose cases and staff noted evidence of systemic gaps in support of people who use drugs (PWUD). They observed that perceived stigma frequently emerged as a key barrier to receiving appropriate care at emergency departments and substance use disorder (SUD) treatment programs.

THT was determined to learn more from the first-hand experiences of people who needed care for overdose or were seeking treatment.

They decided to pilot the OMM indicator, "[Descriptions of experiences of stigma in service settings.](#)"



SEEKING FIRST-HAND PERSPECTIVES

In partnership with a harm reduction center and two treatment centers, THT administered a 14-question, 5-minute anonymous survey. Over 12 days, they heard from 59 survey respondents, who described their reasons for either engaging or not engaging in SUD treatment (among other topics).

The survey was administered by trained project partners in street outreach and substance use treatment intake settings. Incentives were available for respondents who completed the surveys and included a large backpack filled with a new pair of socks, a Clif Bar, and a one-page list of where to find harm-reduction resources in Trenton.

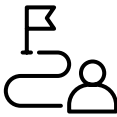
www.overdosemeasuresmatter.org



FACING OBSTACLES TO CARE

The findings from this survey gave THT a deeper understanding of barriers to receiving treatment and possible ways to improve. For instance:

- Most of the 59 respondents (59%) were starting or had started treatment within the past year. However, this **progress was hampered by persistent systemic and logistical barriers** such as bed/program availability, transportation and perceived lack of support for PWUD and their families while in the program. Among those who had initiated treatment, only a third of participants (35%) completed their program.
- An overwhelming 87% of those who did not complete treatment would consider re-entering a program, **underscoring that the desire for recovery remains high despite challenges.**
- A large majority (88%) also indicated they would be more likely to initiate treatment if program staff had lived experience, **directly addressing the impact of stigma and enhancing trust.**
- Participants named several **concrete factors that would make treatment more enticing** and comfortable, including access to cigarettes/smoking, daily hygiene products, and a broad array of activities such as gaming or relaxation activities.



MOVING FROM DATA TO ACTION

THT translated these findings into targeted action that focused on advocacy and policy change within their network.

1. THT shared findings with their network of providers, highlighting the evidence on perceived stigma and the need to prioritize hiring staff with lived experience. They made a call to action, encouraging organizations to evaluate and revise their internal policies related to stigma and patient care.
2. They lobbied for resources from their County Opioid Settlement Committee to appropriate funds specifically for stigma reduction initiatives.
3. Findings were used to develop evidence based grant proposals to advance stigma reduction activities, hire peer recovery support specialists, train community health workers and increase trauma-informed care training for clinical providers.

It was the first initiative to fully integrate PWUD into the design and analysis of research that studied issues related to substance use disorders.



INSPIRING REGIONAL INVESTMENT

“We have successfully influenced internal policy changes and provided a data-driven foundation for the allocation of opioid settlement funds and regional grant investments in our county.”

–Easton Proffitt-Davis, THT Program Specialist