

100,000 Doors:

Overdose Awareness Canvassing and Trusted Community Messenger Program



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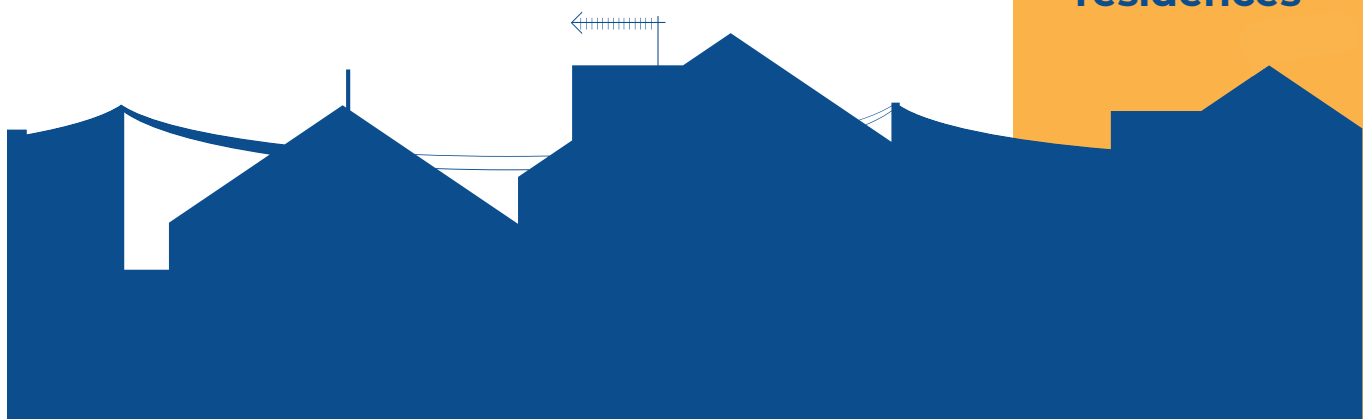
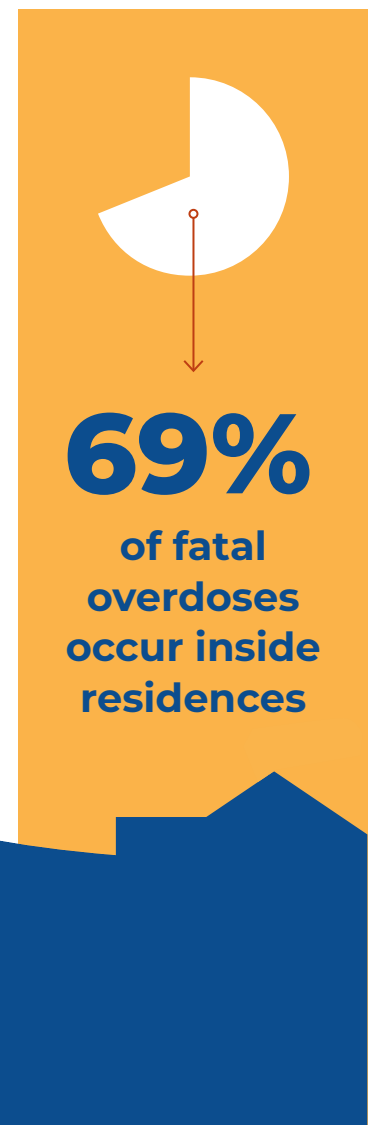
Overview

Unequal access to overdose prevention resources, historic racism, and deep stigma have contributed to a pattern of rapidly increasing rates of overdose deaths of Black Philadelphians. In response, the City of Philadelphia developed a bold plan—to bring lifesaving overdose prevention supplies and substance use treatment information directly to Philadelphian’s doors. It is as a critical component of a larger citywide effort to address the overdose crisis.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, Philadelphia has seen a significant increase in unintentional overdose deaths among Black and Hispanic Philadelphians. Between 2018 and 2022, overdose deaths increased by 87% for non-Hispanic Black individuals and 43% for Hispanic individuals. At the same time, overdose deaths decreased by 12% among non-Hispanic White individuals. In the same 4 year period, the median age of people who died of fatal overdose in Philadelphia increased from 43.5 years old to 48. Non-Hispanic Black males were the group with the most overdose deaths in 2022 and the median age of death was 55 years old.

Toxicology reports from 2018 to 2022 show that substance use patterns vary between demographic groups in Philadelphia, a pattern that is reflected nationwide. For example, opioid without stimulants fatal overdose increased among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic individuals but declined among non-Hispanic White individuals. Stimulant-related deaths have also risen sharply among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic populations in Philadelphia¹.



Historical racism plays a significant role in the current overdose landscape. The War on Drugs, discriminatory legal policy, and social stigma may be reasons why Black and Hispanic Philadelphians are less likely to openly acknowledge drug use² and seek out substance use treatment or overdose prevention tools³. This historical context, along with significant racial inequities in resource distribution, highlights the urgent need for a new approach to address the overdose crisis.

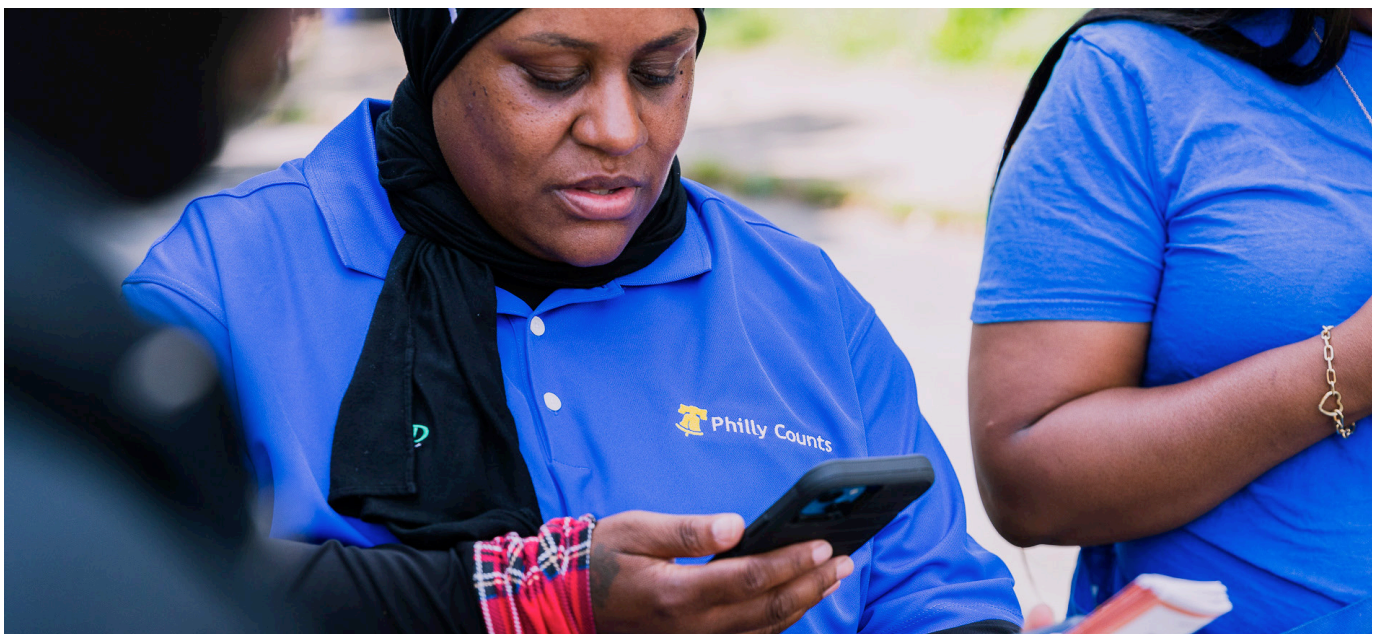
While it may seem Philadelphia's overdose crisis is mostly happening in streets or amongst those experiencing homelessness, most fatal overdoses (69%) occur inside residences.³ Often, family members, friends, or roommates are unaware of any substance use, therefore were not in possession of naloxone (Narcan) or other emergency resources to help prevent or respond to an overdose.

CITY AGENCIES COLLABORATE IN RESPONSE

In the spring of 2023, the City of Philadelphia's Overdose Response Unit (ORU) formed the Citywide Outreach and Engagement workgroup to develop a collaborative response to address the increase of overdoses in Black and Hispanic communities. The goal of the multi-agency workgroup was to better identify overdose prevention and resource gaps, understand how to fill those gaps, and develop a fairer approach to providing overdose prevention tools and treatment information.

The Citywide Outreach and Engagement workgroup gathered a variety of data sources, including maps overlaid with ZIP Codes that showed where overdose rates were increasing and guidance from people with lived experience. Through this work, the group identified gaps in resource distribution. Outreach organizations and agencies have concentrated operations in the Kensington area, ZIP Code 19134. While fatal overdoses are highest in this ZIP Code and support is much needed in this area, more support is needed in other communities, as resources are not reaching other neighborhoods experiencing increasing rates of overdose fatalities.

The workgroup determined that to address these inequities, lifesaving materials must be given to everyone, automatically, and without question, judgment, or self-identification.



Meeting Residents Where They Are

Through the Citywide Outreach and Engagement workgroup, the Overdose Response Unit (ORU) created a program to provide overdose prevention and reversal resources directly to communities with high rates of fatal overdoses through door-to-door canvassing and community messenger training. ORU contracted with the City's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO) to staff the Philly Counts program with dedicated canvassers and community organizers. The program is funded using National Opioid Settlement funds—money the City of Philadelphia receives as a part of the national settlements to repair damages to communities impacted by opioids.



DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING WORKS

In recent years, public health campaigns have seen success in working with trusted community-based organizations and using canvassing to empower residents in impacted communities.^{4 5} These strategies help build trust and tailor messaging to different neighborhoods and communities.

The goal of the canvassing program is to rapidly increase direct outreach in areas of Philadelphia where fatal overdoses are increasing, and resources are lacking. Through a door-to-door approach that engages residents at their homes in these areas, the program also aims to reduce racial disparities that may prevent access to treatment services and overdose prevention resources by partnering with culturally competent community messengers to engage with residents at their homes.

The initial locations were identified as ZIP Codes with increases in overdose deaths between 2021 and 2022, including five priority ZIP Codes outside of Kensington in North and West Philadelphia: 19140, 19124, 19139, 19133, and 19132.

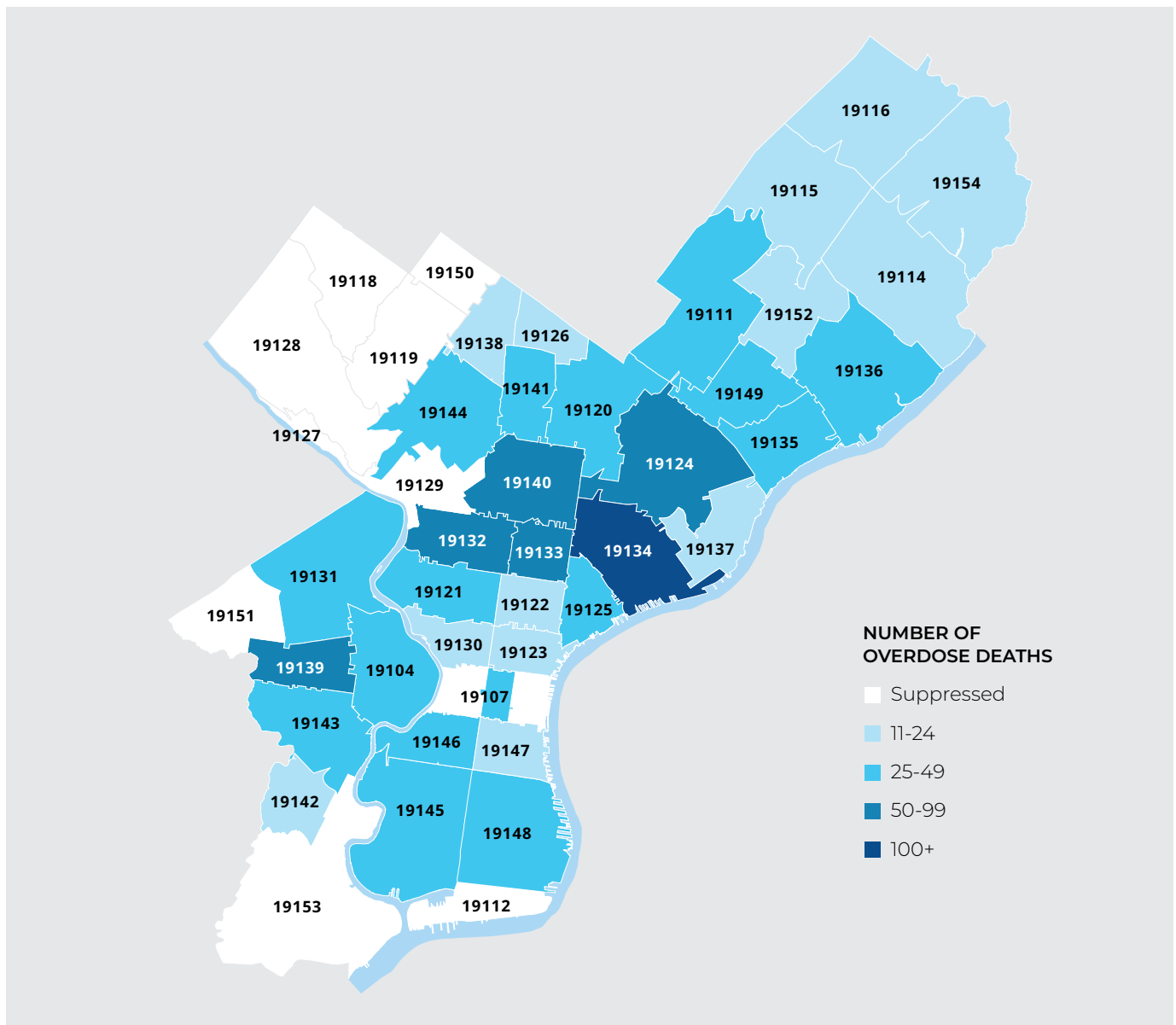
To ensure that canvassers felt confident with overdose data and comfortable sharing personal and life-changing experiences, multiple city agencies provided training around substance use and overdose trends. The script was thoughtfully designed and created to guide interactions with residents, so they feel



comfortable and open to listening. Being mindful that many of these communities have been historically over surveilled, yet under-supplied with respect to factual information, the script also facilitates data collection to track awareness of the overdose crisis and receptiveness to different resources.

The canvassing teams focus on one ZIP Code at a time, focusing on each ZIP Code block-by-block over the course of a few weeks. In teams of two or three, canvassers walk each block in their designated area and knock on every door.

NUMBER OF OVERDOSE DEATHS BY INCIDENT LOCATION, 2022



If canvassers cannot reach a resident, they leave a door-hanging card with information about overdoses and QR codes that link to overdose prevention and treatment resources. When a resident answers the door, canvassers use their script to speak with the resident about the rise in overdose fatalities in the area. Canvassers also offer resources such as the Philly Help Book, free naloxone, fentanyl test strips, and brief training about how to use these tools. If a resident indicates interest in substance use treatment, canvassers contact mobile outreach teams to provide in-person one-on-one support and offer transportation for residents in real-time, that same day.

Recognizing that the overdose crisis is a result of multiple, intersectional factors including poverty and intergenerational trauma, canvassers can also connect residents with Community Health Workers, who will assist residents by connecting them to utility and food assistance, and other city resources.

This innovative canvassing program has been well received by residents and recognized on a national level.

Daliah Heller, Vice President of Drug Use Initiative at Vital Strategies stated that this canvassing method of expanding access to a life-saving drug could be one of the most effective tactics she’s ever seen in her 25 plus years of working in harm reduction. *–NPR Interview*





What is in a canvasser's bag?

Naloxone (Narcan): a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose and save someone's life. Naloxone temporarily blocks the effects of opioids, helping a person breathe again.

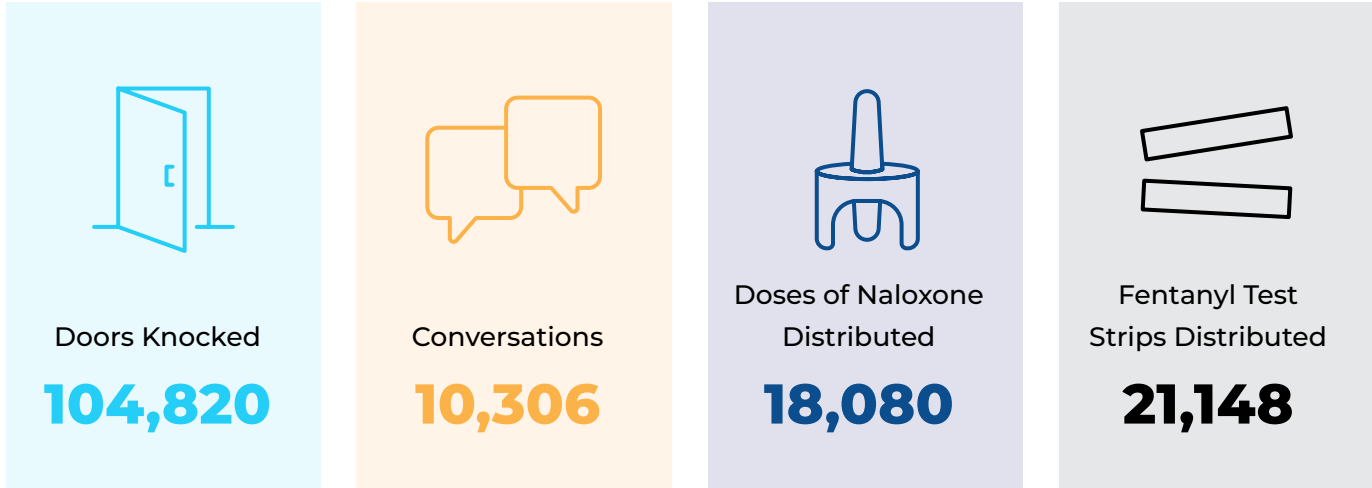
Fentanyl Test Strips: tools that test for the presence of fentanyl in a substance. Test strips can help people make informed decisions about the substances they are using.

Philly Help Book: a resource guide that compiles multiple city, state, and non-profit resources using plain language. This booklet provides simple information on overdose prevention, treatment options, lifesaving resources and other local resources that address social determinants of health.



Significant Impact Realized

Canvassing Impact (OCTOBER 2023 - MAY 2024)

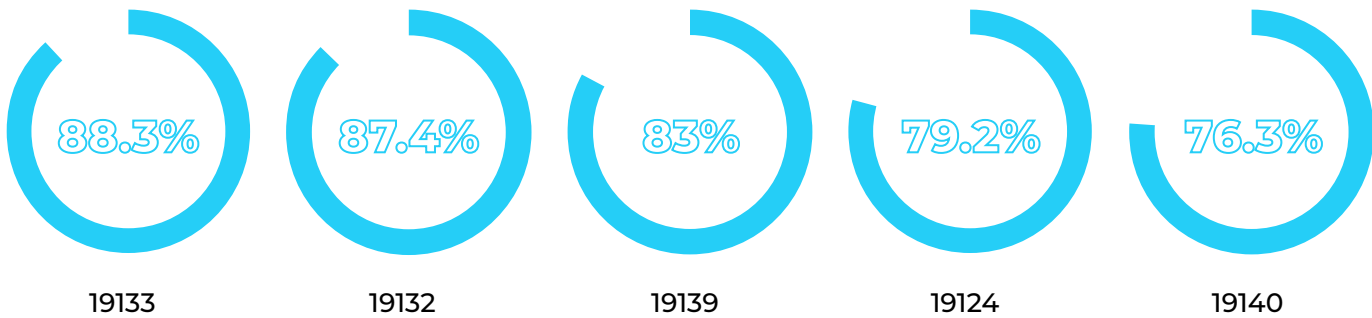


The **contact rate** is the percentage of residents that canvassers successfully reached compared to the total number of doors knocked. While the standard contact rate in Philadelphia is 15-20% (based on previous canvassing efforts), the average contact rate of the canvassing effort was 11%. This lower contact rate may be because of a high number of vacant or inaccessible houses and apartment buildings, and fewer residents at home during canvassing hours.

ZIP code receptiveness:

Receptiveness is the percentage of residents that canvassers reached that said Yes to accepting naloxone and/or fentanyl test strips. Though there were some differences in receptivity, residents of every ZIP Code were very open to accepting these resources. The percentage of households contacted that said Yes to naloxone and/or fentanyl test strips varied by ZIP code and ranged from approximately 76% to 88%.

HOUSEHOLD RECEPTIVENESS OF RESOURCES

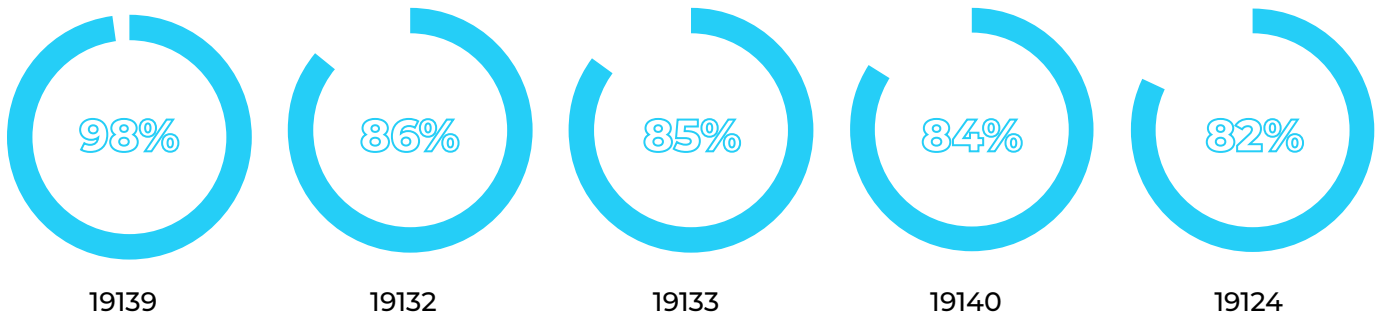


SIGNIFICANT IMPACT REALIZED

The priority ZIP Code with the highest overdose fatality rate (19140) had the lowest rate of acceptance of naloxone and fentanyl test strips. In the next phase, the team plans to work with community members to learn more about this finding and identify ways to more effectively reach these areas.

Canvassers also asked residents if they were aware of the increase in overdose fatalities in their neighborhoods. The percentage of households contacted, indicating 'Yes', they were aware of the increase, was overwhelmingly high in all ZIP codes canvassed, ranging from about 98% to 82%.

HOUSEHOLD AWARENESS OF OVERDOSE INCREASE



While the reported level of awareness remained high in all ZIP codes, it is important to note that 19140 and 19124 reported the lowest level of awareness. The two ZIP codes with the lowest reported level of awareness were also the ZIP codes that were least likely to take resources. This further highlights the need for increased outreach, messaging, and trusted community messenger training in these areas.



Training Trusted Community Messengers

To support the door-to-door canvassing, CEO community organizers work closely with community-based organizations and neighborhood groups to host Trusted Community Messenger training sessions throughout Philadelphia. These training sessions are designed to give a deeper understanding of the overdose crisis in Philadelphia and equip community members with information and resources to care for their families, friends, and neighbors. Attendees also receive a “LifeSaver” kit which includes naloxone, fentanyl test strips, and the Philly Help Book. The end goal is to build a strong network so outreach can be expanded and sustained by people who are part of the community and trusted.

In each Trusted Community Messenger training, CEO's community organizers provide:

- An in-depth overview of overdose fatality data and the changing drug supply in Philadelphia.
- An overview of substance use disorder, treatment options, and available resources.
- Overdose reversal and naloxone training.
- Fentanyl and xylazine test strip training.

The median age of death among non-Hispanic Black males, the demographic group with the largest number of overdose fatalities in 2022, was 55 years old. Training sessions have been particularly effective at reaching Black Philadelphians, with many participants identifying as 45 years and older.

PARTNERS TO DATE INCLUDE:

Real Men Speak

Black Male Community Council of Philadelphia

Ridge Allegheny Hunting Park Civic Association

Frankford Community Development Corporation

Community Health Workers

Representative Ronnie Greene's Office

New Beginnings Restoration Church

CEO Community Resource Corps

Wes Health System, Promise Zone

NET Community Care

QCA Delta Sigma Theta Sorority INC

Eddie's House

Lower North Philadelphia Community Development Corporation

Philadelphia Housing Authority





Through May 2024, CEO's Community Organizers have trained 300 Trusted Community Messengers.

Trusted Community Messenger Trainings (NOVEMBER 2023-MAY 2024)



Trainings
Held

21



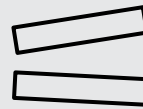
Residents
Trained

300



Naloxone
Doses
Distributed

663



Fentanyl
Test Strips
Distributed

908



Xylazine
Test Strips
Distributed*

402

*Xylazine test strip distribution began in March 2024



Next Steps

Canvassers and trusted community messengers are helping to create a more informed community that can respond to and prevent fatal overdoses, without requiring residents to reveal personal information related to drug use.

MOVING FORWARD

- ORU and CEO will continue the door-to-door canvassing and Trusted Community Messenger programs with the goal of providing all Philadelphians lifesaving tools and substance use treatment information.
- The city will use data collected from this program to improve access in other communities. Program data will also inform future projects that address the racial disparities in the overdose crisis.
- ORU will partner with researchers to assess this work.

Resources Are Available

Please call 988 if you or someone you know is having a mental health crisis or having thoughts of suicide.

HOW TO FIND TREATMENT

- Call Community Behavioral Health (CBH) member services at 888-545-2600 anytime to get help treating a drug and/or alcohol addiction.
- Download the [Philly Help Book](#) for more information about available resources.
- If you don't have insurance, call Behavioral Health Special Initiative (BHSI) at 215-546-1200.
- Visit [findtreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov) to find a provider near you.

To request naloxone (Narcan) or fentanyl test strips be mailed to you, visit nextdistro.org/philly.





This program has received national media attention due to its innovative approach to tackling the overdose crisis. This effort has not only raised awareness but also demonstrates the need for increased community-based intervention, highlighting the importance of culturally competent engagement.

NPR | February 26, 2024

To stop fentanyl deaths in Philly, knocking on doors and handing out overdose kits

[CLICK HERE TO READ](#)



WHYY | October 23, 2023

Philly adopts new door-to-door canvass approach to prevent drug overdose deaths

[CLICK HERE TO READ](#)



The Philadelphia Inquirer | October 23, 2023

Outreach workers hope to knock on 100,000 doors across Philadelphia to prevent overdoses

[CLICK HERE TO READ](#)

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A SPECIAL THANK YOU



We want to say thank you to the hardworking canvassers and community organizers who work to make a difference every day. Their work goes beyond numbers. Each conversation and resource distributed is a step towards a healthier and more informed community.



References

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5. Harkins, C., Shaw R., Gillies, M. *et al.* Overcoming barriers to engaging socio-economically disadvantaged populations in CHD primary prevention: a qualitative study. BMC Public Health 10, 391 (2010).



