





Leading the Way in Harm Reduction Centers: A Rhode Island Case Study

May 2025

NASTAD Annual Meeting

Thomas Bertrand, MPH

Rhode Island Department of Health



Rhode Island's Network of Harm Reduction Community Based Organizations

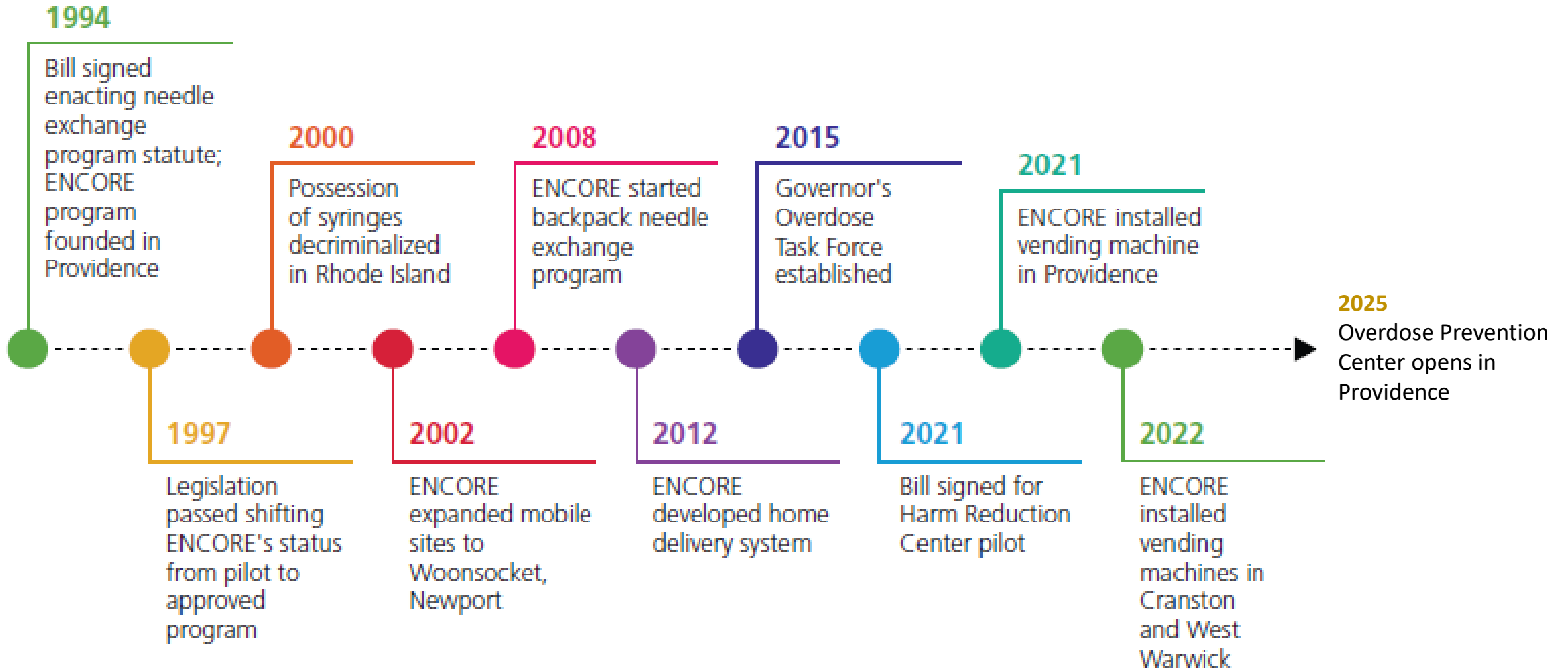


AIDS Care Ocean State





Rhode Island's Harm Reduction Timeline





RI Harm Reduction Program Features

Services

Counseling and Referrals

- SUD Care
- Housing
- Mental Health
- Family Planning

HIV/HCV Testing

- Counseling
- Referral
- Confirmation Testing

Supplies

Safe Sex

- Condoms
- Lube

Safe Injecting

- Naloxone
- Syringes
- Fentanyl Test Strips
- Disposal

Reproductive Health

- Early Pregnancy Tests

Basic Needs

- Nicorette Gum
- Rain Ponchos
- Backpacks
- Wound Kits
- Hygiene Kits (Women/General)
- Toothbrush/toothpaste

Access Points

Street Outreach

Mobile Vans

Home Delivered Services

Vending Machines

- Community Health Centers
- SUD Treatment Sites
- SSP Locations
- Public Transit Hubs
- Department of Corrections

Harm Reduction Vending Machines at RIDOC



Dr. Justin Berk, Medical Director



Locations: Discharge, Women's Prison, Probation Offices

Contents: Naloxone, condoms, Nicorette gum, oral health products, early-pregnancy tests, ENCORE information

Harm Reduction Center Legislation (June 2021)



2021 -- S 0016 SUBSTITUTE B

LC000618/SUB B

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

AN ACT

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY - HARM REDUCTION CENTER ADVISORY
COMMITTEE AND PILOT PROGRAM

Introduced By: Senators Miller, Goodwin, McCaffrey, Archambault, F Lombardi,
Ciccone, Quezada, Lombardo, Sosnowski, and Murray

Date Introduced: January 15, 2021

Referred To: Senate Health & Human Services

What's In the bill?

1. Authorizes Harm Reduction Centers
2. Regulations Promulgated by RIODH by March 2022
3. Establishes Governor's Committee to advise RIDOH
4. Liability Protections

What were the compromises?

1. Two-year pilot
2. City/Town approval

insite (Supervised Consumption Site, Vancouver, B.C.)



“A community-based resource for health screening, disease prevention, and recovery assistance where people may safely consume pre-obtained substances.”

Drug User Harm Reduction Support



Brandon Marshall, PhD



AnnaJane Yolken



Senator Josh Miller



Ray Joseph

Harm Reduction Legislation



Barriers

- History of punitive, racialized approaches to address drug-related problems in the U.S.
- NIMBism: Not in my backyard
- Confusing terminology: OD Prevention Center vs. Harm Reduction Site vs. Supervised Consumption Site
- False narratives and poor public understanding of substance use disorders
- Myths that supervised consumption sites increase drug use, crime, and/or public disorder
- Federal Law

Catalysts

- Continuous Nonpartisan one-issue lobbying
- Lawmakers who lost family members
- World class researchers
- ***Champions within state agencies***
- Small state – get press, access to lawmakers
- Increasing overdose deaths
- 25-year history of needle exchange program
- Canada's experience as a model

RIDOH Harm Reduction Center Regulations



Highlights

- Community Advisory Committee
- Cost benefit analysis
- Established new facility type
- Three rounds of public comment
- Includes requirement for harm reduction services
- Client rights/responsibilities
- People under 18 and pregnant people not permitted





WEBER*RENEW

Our Mission



Project Weber/RENEW provides peer-led harm reduction and recovery support services, builds relationships with the people we serve, and fights for systemic change.

We empower people who use drugs and/or engage in sex work to make healthier and safer choices in their own lives.

We aim to prevent overdose as well as HIV and hepatitis C, and connect folks to support systems that keep them alive and connected to care.

We believe that all people deserve a loving space free from judgment and that everyone has the power to change.

The PWR Team:

- 42% identify as LGBTQIA+
- 60% have experienced homelessness
- 31% have engaged in sex work
- 54% are in recovery from substance use disorder
- 57% are people of color
- 60% have criminal justice histories



Overdose Prevention Center

- Authorized by RI state law, passed in 2021
- Approved by Providence City Council in 2024
- Regulated and licensed by RIDOH
- Range of services, including medical and substance use treatment services via our clinical partner at VICTA behavioral health.
- Funding provided by the state and city opioid settlement dollars
- Will be evaluated rigorously by experts at Brown University
- Located at 45 Willard Ave, shown here—>

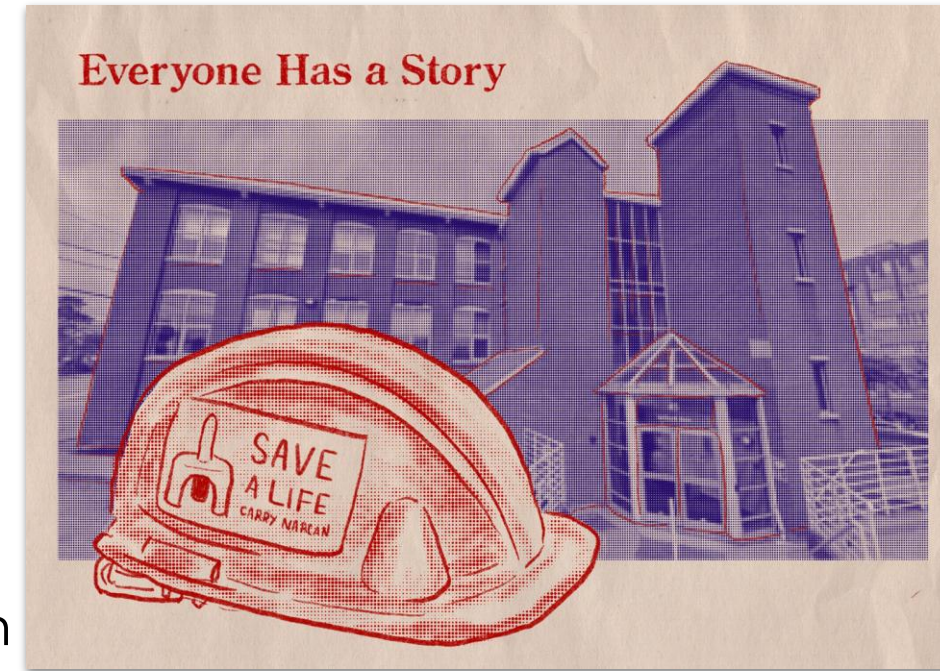


Project Weber/RENEW's Overdose Prevention Center



Services Offered at the Overdose Prevention Center

- **Harm reduction** supplies and education
- **Peer recovery support**, counseling, support groups, case management
- **Supervised consumption** of substances on-site
- **Medical care** including HIV/hepatitis C testing and referrals to treatment, wound care, STI testing, etc
- **Basic needs**, syringe disposal and clean-up
- **Housing support** (CES and shelter navigation, Recovery housing navigation and payment)
- **Same-day** access to substance use and mental health treatment
- **Triage**, referral, and transport to higher levels of care



Overdose Prevention Center

- Since Opening served 293 unique people
- 1840 visits
- Have performed 67 OD interventions
- 41 referrals to med care/treatment
- 570 wound care services





Thomas Bertrand, MPH, MA
Center for HIV, Hepatitis, STD and TB Epidemiology
Rhode Island Department of Health
Thomas.Bertrand@health.ri.gov