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AMIDST RISING DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS, ILLINOIS GROUPS LAUNCH ILLINOIS HARM REDUCTION & RECOVERY COALITION

[ILLINOIS] - Today, the Illinois Harm Reduction & Recovery Coalition (IHRRC) is announcing its formal coalition launch and official website in response to the rising number of overdose deaths in Illinois and across the country.

Drug overdose death rates in the United States are at their highest point in history. In 2020, Illinois lost nearly 3,000 lives from opioids alone. Since 2019, Illinois opioid overdose deaths increased by:

- **55%** in urban areas
- **39%** in rural areas
- **11%** in suburban and small urban areas (*Source: [IDPH](#)*)

The overdose epidemic has shaken communities to their core, especially those with high populations of Black, Brown, and low income individuals. With traditional services disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, people who are already vulnerable are overdosing in isolation at increasingly high rates. A targeted response is needed to address disparities, and IHRRC is ready to work with lawmakers, government agencies, the criminal justice system, social services, and healthcare providers to quickly create this change.

“Most people know someone who has used drugs or died from an opioid overdose. This painful yet preventable crisis has destroyed families across Illinois - including my own. I co-founded IHRRC in 2018 to save lives by bringing together advocates from across the state. We cannot drive out stigma and shame, and end this crisis by working in silos. Together, fueled by the concept of meeting people where they are at, we are advancing public health and healing over continuous cycles of punishment, harm, and neglect,” said Chelsea Laliberte Barnes, LSW, CCTP and Co-Founder of Live4Lali.

The Illinois Harm Reduction & Recovery Coalition works to advance community-centered and intersectional policy reforms with the goal of promoting a public health approach, rather than criminal justice approach, to substance use. As an informal group co-lead by Laliberte Barnes and Timothy Jackson with AIDS Foundation Chicago, the coalition has worked on a number of issues over the last four years, including naloxone access laws, expanding the number of community health workers, increasing protections of the 911 Good Samaritan Overdose Law, and legalizing harm reduction programs statewide.

“We are only able to be successful in our work by centering the lived experiences of those most impacted by substance use and the opioid epidemic,” said Timothy Jackson, co-chair of the coalition. “The advocates of the Illinois Harm Reduction and Recovery Coalition are poised and ready to continue our mission in addressing the harms facing Illinois families and communities.”

This year, IHRRC’s primary focus is on state legislation to pilot Overdose Prevention Sites. Currently, the coalition is working to support the [Overdose Prevention Sites Pilot Program](#) legislation sponsored by State Representatives La Shawn Ford and Kelly Cassidy. The program would target communities at high risk of overdose deaths and pilot Overdose Prevention Sites, safe locations for people to use pre-obtained substances under the supervision of peers and medical staff with training on overdose and harm reduction. Such sites already exist in over 11 countries - including the United States - and to date, no one has died at an Overdose Prevention Site. To learn more about the coalition, members, and 2022 legislative priorities, please visit <https://www.illinoisharmreduction.org/advocacy>.

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About the Illinois Harm Reduction & Recovery Coalition - IHRRC was formed in 2018 as a collective of organizations, providers, people with lived experience, and other stakeholders who came together to start a statewide movement that eliminates stigma against people who use drugs and upholds every individual's sense of dignity and well-being. Formalizing their partnership in 2022, the Coalition has dozens of individual and organizational members, including:

A Safe Haven, Above and Beyond Family Recovery Center, ACLU Illinois, AIDS Foundation Chicago, Arukah Institute, Center for Housing & Health, Champaign Urbana Public Health District, Chicago Recovery Alliance, Chicago Urban League, Cook County Health and Hospital Systems, Healthcare Alternative Systems, Heartland Alliance/Heartland Alliance Health, Howard Brown Health, Illinois Collaborative on Youth, Illinois Public Health Institute, Jolt Harm Reduction, Lake County Opioid Initiative, Lawndale Christian Health Center, Live4Lali, Memorial Health System, MoNetwork, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health, The Perfectly Flawed Foundation, Phoenix Center, Renaissance Social Services, Rush University SUD Leadership Center, PCC Community Wellness, Safer Foundation, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, TASC, The Night Ministry, The Porchlight Collective SAP, Thresholds, UI Health, UIC - Community Outreach Intervention Projects, UIC - Mile Square, Universal Health Services, Inc., West Side Heroin & Opioid Task Force