



## Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction and Overdose Prevention

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Hello, my name is Diana Aguglia. I am the Plattsburgh regional director for the Alliance for Positive Health. I oversee several Harm Reduction programs, including a Syringe Service Program, Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, Drug User Health Hub and Hepatitis C Patient Navigation Program. As a provider in a rural area in Northeastern New York, my colleagues and I have seen too many people die from overdoses and have seen too many people infected with HIV and Hepatitis C when it could have been prevented.

All around the state, including in rural areas, people are struggling with addiction, and many are dying. Alongside of these people are other people who are fighting to keep them alive, fighting to keep loving them until they feel worthy for something better, fighting to get more resources to provide the services that we need, and fighting to get up another day to start the fight all over again.

Communities all around NYS have been devastated by the opioid epidemic, and people are seriously concerned enough to try different approaches. We have tried arresting people, in-patient treatment, out-patient treatment, shaming people, blaming people, enabling people, kicking people out of treatment, drug court, telling people that they have to wait for treatment, and denying treatment for a variety of reasons. What we know is that shaming doesn't work, blaming doesn't work, and enabling doesn't work. In-patient and out-patient treatment works, but for only some people; one-size-fits-all approaches to treatment don't work. Court mandated treatment doesn't work. Locking people up doesn't work.

What we do know is that harm reduction works. Access to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) works. The road to recovery begins with treating people with dignity and respect, meeting people where they are, accepting them where they are, and assisting them to meet the needs that they are **ready** to meet. Harm reduction is not just about assisting people to reduce the harm they cause to themselves, it's also about reducing the harm that we cause to people who use drugs by the way we communicate with them and even by the way we try to help.

Harm Reduction services, including Syringe Service Programs, are known for preventing needless cases of HIV, Hepatitis C and abscesses. These services also save lives, connect people to care, work to stabilize and improve their lives, and ready them for substance use treatment.

The Alliance's Syringe Service Program is the only program covering Clinton, Franklin Essex, Hamilton, Warren and Washington counties. In order to have a meaningful impact on the opioid epidemic, we need better access to live-saving services in rural areas, including Syringe Service Programs, MAT and Opioid Overdose Prevention. This requires additional sites and additional staff to ensure that people living in rural areas have appropriate access.

It's time to change the landscape of addiction. We need to hear more stories of hope and recovery. We need more resources invested in what we know works which includes harm reduction and Medication Assisted Treatment. We are asking our lawmakers to help us to put more resources into strategies that actually work. That is the only way to support people in their journey towards a healthier life.

For additional information, please contact:

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