

First Annual Overdose Response Summit

Bridging the Gap for People Who Use Drugs:

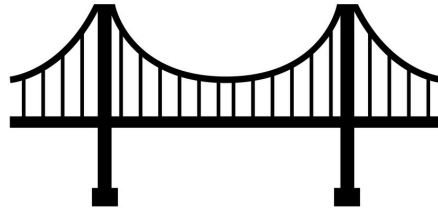
**Uniting EMS/First Responders, Harm Reduction, Local Public Health and
Human Services, OFRTs and Treatment**

When: Wednesday, November 19, 2025

8am - 5pm

**Where: Harrah's Waterfront Convention Center
777 Harrah's Blvd. Atlantic City, NJ**

Cost: \$20 - Includes Breakfast and Lunch



About the Summit:

This event brings together EMS, harm reduction agencies, public health and human services, Overdose Fatality Review Teams (OFRTs) and substance use treatment providers from all regions in the State toward improving care for people who use drugs. By equipping first responders and local stakeholders with harm reduction tools and training, we create respectful, nonjudgmental encounters that build trust and open doors to health services—whether or not someone is ready for treatment. By creating spaces for professionals from multiple sectors to convene and share best practices and experience-informed approaches for improving the continuum of care, we create an actionable framework for improving the wellbeing of those we serve. Together, we're creating a more compassionate, connected system of care.

Who Should Attend:

EMS/first responders, harm reduction agencies, local health and human services, Overdose Fatality Review Teams, Substance Use treatment providers, MATTERS Advisory Council Members, people who use drugs (PWUD), community organizations, anyone interested in being part of improving health and wellbeing for New Jerseyans.

This event is held in partnership with the National Conference on EMS. For more information or to register for the Summit or Conference please visit:

<https://www.NationalConferenceonEms.com/>

AGENDA

8:00 am – 8:30 am – Registration and Networking

8:30 am – 8:45 am – Welcome and Opening Remarks

Novneet Sahu, MD, MPH, Deputy Commissioner, Public Health Services, NJ Department of Health

8:45 am – 9:15 am – New Jersey's Opioid Response and Future Directions

Michele Calvo, Executive Director, Office of Opioid Policy and Response, NJ Department of Health

This session will include an overview of the State's approach to overdose prevention and response, including a focus on harm reduction and rapid access to medications and care. This session will also provide a look at future directions in drug policy and treatment to promote health and wellbeing for New Jerseyans.

9:15 am – 10:15 am – Rapid Referral Platform: "Meeting People Where They Are: A multi-prong approach to tackling drug overdoses and the addiction crisis"

Dr. Kimberly Boulden, PhD and Mila Pakhomova, BSN, MATTERS Network

Jenny Gerace, Southern NJ Outreach Coordinator—MATTERS, NJ Department of Health

MATTERS® works to improve care outcomes for those with substance use disorder through its rapid referral platform, robust follow up and support services, network of harm re-duction vending machines and direct-mail supplies, and through targeted public health education campaigns. As the opioid crisis evolves, MATTERS has strategically pivoted to meet individuals and organizations where they are by bridging gaps and integrating support. MATTERS has since implemented a multifaceted approach to treatment, harm reduction, and marketing that prioritizes and leverages existing community-based resources. In this session, MATTERS leadership will review the outcomes and efficacy of a variety of strategies to directly engage both people who use drugs (PWUD) and the communities that serve them and how New Jersey can leverage a Rapid Referral platform to improve connections, access and outcomes for PWUD in our State.

10:15 am – 10:35 am - Break

10:35 am – 11:35 am – "On the Front Line": Incorporating Prehospital Data and EMS to Combat the Opioid Crisis

Cassandra Angelo, BS, Outreach Coordinator, Office of Data Analytics, Resources and Infrastructure, NJ Department of Health

Timothy Seplaki, BS, NRP, CPM, Chief, EMS Data and Intelligence, Office of Data Analytics, Resources, and Infrastructure, NJ Department of Health

This session will explore the utilization of emergency medical services (EMS) data and EMS clinicians to combat the opioid epidemic in participants' jurisdictions. It will highlight New Jersey's combined collaborative efforts with EMS, law enforcement, as well as local and state public health agencies. Through this collaboration, stakeholders monitor suspected opioid and other illicit drug overdoses and identify surges through "hot spot" geo-mapping, as well as implement medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in the prehospital setting. Additionally, this session will discuss "Five Minutes to Help," an innovative program aimed at providing EMS clinicians with a better understanding of Substance Use Disorder (SUD), addressing stigma, Harm Reduction, and changing behaviors at the prehospital provider level. The program emphasizes the critical role of EMS providers, who often are the only healthcare professionals interacting with non-fatal overdose patients.

11:45am – 1pm - Lunch and Networking

1pm-2pm – EMS' Role in Recognizing Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and Human Trafficking

Laura Magnone, Bureau Chief, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of the Attorney General

Rolidel Czekajlo, Covenant House

This multidisciplinary session equips EMS professionals to detect and respond to signs of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and human trafficking while on scene. Speakers will share lessons from region-wide deflection and outreach initiatives, and will outline investigative red flags drawn from complex trafficking cases. Covenant House New Jersey and the New Jersey Attorney General's Office will add a trauma-informed, victim-centered perspective and highlight statewide resources. Attendees will leave with actionable strategies to strengthen interagency coordination and deliver compassionate, effective care to vulnerable individuals.

AGENDA

2pm – 3:30 pm - Interactive Panel: The Importance of Using A Harm Reduction Approach

Paul Comber, MD, Emergency Medicine Physician, Cooper University Health Care, Camden NJ

Bobby Singletary, CPRS, Outreach Director, Tier 1 Recovery, Chosen Generation Community Corp., Paterson NJ

Chad Harlan, CPRS, Case Manager, Prevention Resource Network, Visiting Nurse Association, Asbury Park NJ

Charla Cousar, Program Management Officer, Division of HIV, STDs and Tuberculosis, New Jersey Dept of Health (Moderator)

Harm reduction is a health approach and a movement for social justice that reduces the risks surrounding drug use without requiring behavior change (e.g., abstinence), providing support and supplies to improve safety and health. It acts as an important entry point into care for people often disconnected from healthcare. In New Jersey, harm reduction agencies offer services like syringe access, naloxone distribution, testing strips, and education. EMS, hospitals, and healthcare providers can also now provide harm reduction supplies, supported by recent state laws. Personal stories show how respectful, brief EMS interactions and access to harm reduction can make a big difference, especially when patients are not ready or interested in formal treatment.

3:30 pm – 3:45 pm - Break

3:45 pm – 4:30 pm – What is Going On in My Backyard?

Emelyn Falcon, MPH, PMO - MATTERS, Office of Opioid Response and Policy, NJ Department of Health

Kerry Griffin, MPA, CPS, Deputy Director, Office of Opioid Response and Policy, NJ Department of Health

In this interactive session, participants will gather by region to better understand current resources, activities and needs in their area and strategize across the continuum of care — from prevention, pre-hospital (ALS/BLS), treatment, harm reduction, recovery and community supports — toward improving outcomes for PWUD in New Jersey.

4:30 pm – 5:00 pm – Closing

NJ Department of Health Office of Opioid Response and Policy Team

Participants will be invited to reflect on learnings and key takeaways from the day and share their action plans for the next three months-, six months- and year toward bridging the gap for better outcomes for PWUD in New Jersey.

THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!