

INNOVATIONS IN OVERDOSE PREVENTION: USING THE TELEPHONE TO SAVE LIVES

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Never Use Alone

Background:

Over 100,000 U.S. residents died of preventable overdose in 2021. As the response by government proved wholly ineffective, people who use drugs and their allies raced to address the crisis. One model that emerged from this urgent need was the hotline Never Use Alone.

Description of model of care/intervention:

Never Use Alone is an all volunteer network of people from across the U.S. who are committed to preventing the unnecessary deaths of people who use drugs from poisonings and preventable overdose. Operators are trained in recognizing the signs of respiratory distress and will dispatch emergency medical services to callers experiencing a poisoning or an overdose. Callers may receive harm reduction counseling, legal information, such as Good Samaritan laws in their state, and referrals, upon request, along with human connection and access to a nonjudgmental listener.

Effectiveness:

Since establishing in early 2020, Never Use Alone has received 6,600 calls from the U.S. and Canada. Our operators have called EMS 46 times for callers in respiratory distress. In all 46 cases, emergency medical technicians were able to revive the caller and a life was saved. This has been done at minimal expense. As the hotline is currently staffed entirely by volunteers, the only current expenses are operating an 800 number, printing promotional materials and maintaining the website.

Conclusion and next steps:

As the drug poisoning crisis continues to rage in the U.S., the need for innovative interventions only grows. Never Use Alone intends to keep growing with the end goal of having a hotline in every major city. Plans to provide trainings in overdose response within the community are now underway. A companion hotline for people seeking nonjudgmental, truthful information about substance use and drug interactions is also in development.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: None