



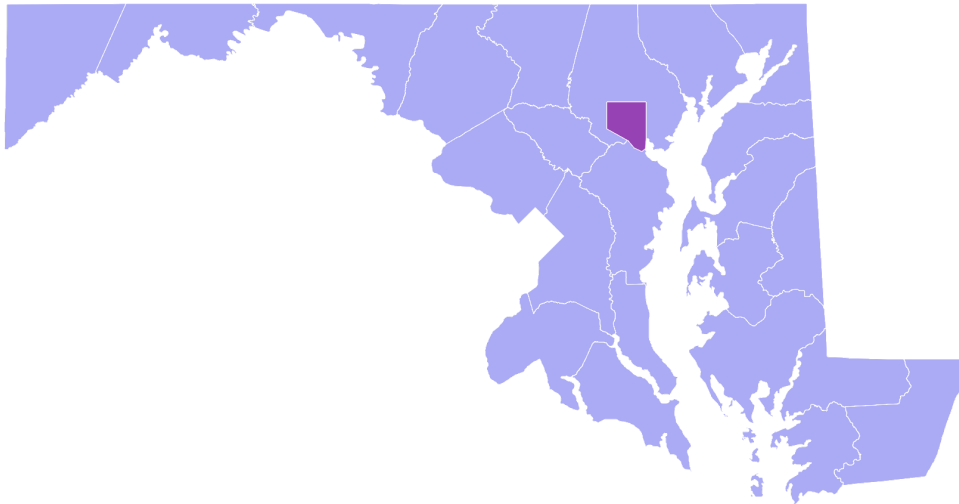
Maryland's Office of
Overdose Response

Community Overdose Action

Town Hall Series

Regional Event Summary

Baltimore City



Monday, September 18, 2023

Enoch Pratt Free Library – Central Library
400 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201

Overview

In September 2023, Maryland's Office of Overdose Response launched our Community Overdose Action Town Hall Series, through which we are visiting each of Maryland's 24 local jurisdictions to hear community feedback about how Maryland can do more to address the overdose crisis. Through these events, we received a tremendous amount of feedback from Marylanders about how overdose has affected their lives and their communities. We also heard their ideas for how state and local leaders can do more to expand access to care and save lives.

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our town hall series. Public input will be a key consideration for informing Maryland's strategic policy priorities for addressing overdose morbidity and mortality throughout the state. Each community has its own specific needs, and it is important that these needs be considered in the formulation of state and local-level policy.

Baltimore City

Our town hall event for Baltimore City was held on September 18, 2023, at the Central Library of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The event featured presentations from Lt. Governor Aruna Miller, Special Secretary of Overdose Response Emily Keller, Acting Baltimore City Health Commissioner Mary Beth Haller, Brittney Spencer representing the Baltimore City Health Department and Crista Taylor representing Behavioral Health Systems Baltimore, Baltimore Councilmember Zeke Cohen, representing District 1, Tiffinee Scott representing the Maryland Peer Advisory Council, and Enoch Pratt Free Library President & CEO Heidi Daniel.

While Baltimore City is located in Maryland's Central Region, the opioid and overdose crisis has had more severe impacts in Baltimore City compared to surrounding jurisdictions. Baltimore also has unique challenges and unique opportunities to provide care to individuals who have been impacted by substance use. As such, feedback from the Baltimore City town hall is presented below independently from the town halls held in the rest of Maryland's Central Region.

Community Feedback

Individuals who have participated in our town hall series across the state have addressed many common themes as well as county-specific challenges to addressing the overdose crisis. Individuals who shared their stories and their feedback included people in recovery, family members of individuals who use drugs, family members who have lost loved ones to overdose, representatives of community organizations, local government representatives, individuals experiencing homelessness, members of faith-based communities, representatives of treatment and recovery providers, students, and others. The input we received during our Baltimore City town hall is summarized below.

Note: The views summarized here are those of the individuals who participated in our town hall series. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Maryland Department of Health or the Moore-Miller administration. Feedback has been anonymized and summarized for concision while preserving the intent of the speakers to the greatest extent possible. Feedback regarding similar themes has been combined where appropriate.

- Community organizations and government officials have opportunities to collaborate more closely to address the overdose crisis.
- Drug policy in the United States is grounded in racism and was designed to oppress Black people and other communities of color.
- Overdose disproportionately affects older Black men in Baltimore City, many of whom were formerly incarcerated. Syringe services primarily serve this population, and more support is needed for this work.
- Maryland should decriminalize drug paraphernalia, and the Governor should issue an executive order in support of overdose prevention sites.
- Overdose prevention sites can save lives and are needed in Baltimore City. No one has died from an overdose at overdose prevention sites.
- Data from the CDC show that over 60% of individuals who died from an overdose used drugs alone without a bystander present. Tools, such as the Never Use Alone hotline, can help alert emergency services for individuals using drugs in solitary environments.
- Maryland should work to promote leadership and advocacy among community members affected by substance use and overdose to help increase the efficacy of our response efforts.
- State and local officials should leverage the expertise of individuals with lived experience in the formulation of policy.
- Peer recovery specialists need a special designation for those who specialize in connecting individuals to recovery housing.
- Individuals who sell drugs would benefit from more opportunities to develop business skills and pathways to licit entrepreneurship.
- Peer support specialists can help provide transformative change for individuals who use drugs and serve as role models for those engaging in illicit activities.
- Cannabis should be used more broadly for medicinal purposes, such as addressing physical pain. Greater utilization of cannabis would decrease the need for opioids to treat chronic pain.
- Many recovery homes in Maryland operate without certifications, which in some cases leads to dangerous environments and physical and sexual abuse. More needs to be done to address dangerous practices in unregulated recovery homes.
- More needs to be done to support children who have parents or loved ones with substance use disorders, which can be a traumatic experience. Trauma, violence, and substance use are inextricably linked.