



CITY OF CHICAGO

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

March 13, 2025

Illinois General Assembly
Mental Health & Addiction Committee
Springfield, IL

Attention: Chairperson LaPointe

Re: HB 2929: Overdose Prevention Sites

Dear Chairperson LaPointe, Vice Chairperson Katz-Muhl, and honorable members of the Mental Health & Addiction Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to join the conversation today on a matter of critical importance to public health in Chicago: reducing overdose deaths and increasing enrollment in harm reduction, treatment programs, and other services. As Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health, I write to you as an advocate for evidence-based solutions that center the most impacted people and places. In 2023 alone, we tragically lost more than 1,300 Chicagoans to preventable opioid overdose-related deaths. Overdoses are devastating our West and South sides—communities need public health’s holistic approach and most effective interventions.

Overdose prevention sites are evidence-based health resource centers that save lives, reduce harm, and promote care. They reduce the risk of harm related to drug use, including fatal overdose, and provide health services to people who use drugs, including medical care, referrals to community services, education about safer use techniques, and more. In the 35 years of research on 200+ overdose prevention sites throughout the world, there have been zero reported deaths to date.¹ Beyond preventing deaths, these sites effectively function as culturally competent health hubs for a population that may not otherwise receive care. The New York City OnPoint centers, for example, provide mental health services, clinical care, case management, and many other person-centered offerings.² National public health authorities like the American Medical Association³ and American Society of Addiction Medicine⁴ support overdose prevention sites.

To ensure this is effective in a local context, the most impacted communities must be centered. CDPH partnered with community advocates West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force in Summer 2024 to drive overdoses down 23 percent in our most affected neighborhoods.⁵ In addition to engaging people door-to-door and providing harm reduction supplies, outreach workers polled residents on the operation of an overdose prevention site on Chicago’s West Side. As of Monday this week, an overwhelming 86 percent of respondents indicated support. We ask that your deliberations and any following implementation similarly engage and utilize local knowledge.



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This legislation takes an important step forward by creating a pilot program for the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) to develop one OPS site in Chicago and determine the types of medical care, mental health care, and social services that can be offered there. Importantly, it also allows IDHS to study OPS program effectiveness, best practices, benefits, and challenges, and present findings.

CDPH stands ready to partner on initiatives like this that will combat overdoses and increase linkage to care. We look forward to working together with city and state policymakers, the most impacted communities, and other partners to promote greater health and wellbeing for all Chicagoans.

Sincerely,

Olusimbo Ige, MD
Commissioner
Chicago Department of Public Health