



## **Public health advocates call for swift action as overdose deaths reach all-time high**

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Data regarding overdose deaths in the Commonwealth released today by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health is devastating. Each of the 2,357 overdose deaths last year represents a family in pain and a community loss. These deaths are preventable; every overdose death is a policy failure. At the heart of these data is the reality that racial disparities are getting worse: the rate of overdose for Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic people increased significantly while rates of overdose for white people decreased.

We applaud the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the Healey-Driscoll Administration for taking action in the face of this devastating report. The plan outlined by MDPH, including a fast-tracked overdose prevention center feasibility study, puts Massachusetts on the path to reverse the trends and save lives by focusing on harm reduction and root causes. While some states are implementing ill-conceived criminalization and punitive measures in response to overdose deaths, we are glad to see MDPH and the Healey-Driscoll Administration rely on data and experience that shows that the public health approach is more effective and long-lasting.

The Massachusetts Public Health Association has endorsed and is a member of the coalition advocating for the quick passage of H.1981/S.1242, An Act Relative to Preventing Overdose Deaths and Increasing Access to Treatment, sponsored by Rep. Dylan Fernandes, Rep. Marjorie Decker, and Sen. Julian Cyr to establish an overdose prevention center pilot program. Overdose prevention centers are a life-saving public health intervention.

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Relevant Data Points from MDPH 2023 Q1 Semiannual Report  
Between 2021 and 2022 the rates of opioid-related deaths:

- Increased by 41% for Black men (56.4 deaths per 100,000 people in 2021 vs 79.6 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022)
- Increased by 47% for Black women (17.4/100,000 vs 25.5/100,000)
- Increased by 12% for Hispanic men (65.2/100,000 vs 72.2/100,000)

- Increased by 36% for Hispanic women (14.2/100,000 vs 19.3/100,000)
- Decreased by 9% for white men (52.7/100,000 vs 47.8/100,000)
- Decreased by 7% for white women (20.7/100,000 vs 19.3/100,000)

*The Massachusetts Public Health Association (MPHA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a healthy Massachusetts through advocacy, community organizing, and coalition building. We are leaders in the movement to create health equity by addressing the root causes of health and wellness. We promote policies that impact the major drivers of health outcomes, such as access to healthy food, safe affordable housing, and transportation. We also advocate for equitable public health services throughout the Commonwealth. To learn more, visit [www.mapublichealth.org](http://www.mapublichealth.org).*