

# PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

## Definition of Harm Reduction

Harm Reduction is a public health philosophy that seeks to empower the clients, remove barriers to access, and supply pragmatic approaches to risk reduction in a non-judgmental/non-coercive way that is compassionate and accepting of any positive change. It supports a wide spectrum of strategies from doing the behavior safer, to limiting certain behaviors, to abstinence.

## What this means for our volunteers in our programs

- Meeting the client where they are, using program designed for the community being served
- Non-judgmental and non-coercive services provided to clients in the communities and places they are comfortable and safe in order to empower them to reduce the attendant harm
- Accepts that drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than ignore or condemn them
- Understands that drug use and behavior change are complex and multifaceted. They include a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence.
- It acknowledges that some ways of drug use are safer than others, and respects each individual's drug use choices.
- Establishes quality of community and individual life and well-being—not necessarily of drug use—as the successful interventions and policies
- Ensures that people who inject drugs and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them
- Affirms that people who inject drugs themselves are the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use, and seeks to empower them to support each other and share information
- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for dealing with drug-related harm
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real or tragic harm and dangers associated with licit and illicit drug use