

Title: 3.4 Harm Reduction

Prepared By: Community Alliance

Reviewed By: Governing Council

Approved By: Governing Council

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Purpose:

The purpose of a Harm Reduction policy is to formalize policies and procedures that minimize negative health impacts on a client. Harm Reduction is a practical set of strategies that aims to reduce the harm associated with risky behavior, such as unsafe drug use or other risky behaviors, without necessarily eliminating the behavior from the individual's lifestyle. Harm Reduction focuses on creating positive change for clients without judgement, coercion, discrimination, or requiring that a person stop engaging in a negative behavior in order to receive services or assistance. Harm Reduction aligns with the federal Housing First principles and incorporating Harm Reduction into Continuum of Care (CoC) policies and procedures will work to help increase client safety, success, and overall health.

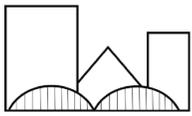
Scope:

This policy applies to everyone who operates under the umbrella of the CoC, including the CoC and HMIS Lead Agencies, the MSCHC Governing Council, and agencies that receive CoC and/or ESG funding for program operation.

Policy:

The following principles have been adopted by the CoC in regard to Harm Reduction within CoC Programs:

1. Abstinence should not be an automatic shared goal for programs and clients. Clients may have a goal of stopping their risky behaviors, but it should not be a condition for program entry that clients end risky behaviors or commit to a goal of abstinence while in the program. The continuum recognizes that behavior change is incremental and therefore there are many opportunities for people to be successful. It recognizes any positive change as a success with quality of life & well-being as criteria for measuring success. Risky behaviors are complicated, and people engage in risky behaviors for a variety of reasons. While many traditional programs are abstinence based, many



people continue to engage in risky behaviors even when in programs. Harm Reduction allows service providers to work with people on achieving their identified goals without condemning or terminating them from a program for continuing to engage in risky behaviors.

2. Harm Reduction believes that every person has a right to information, materials and services that could potentially save their lives. Rather than minimize or ignore the real harm and danger associated with licit and illicit drug use or risky behaviors, it acknowledges that there are ways to engage in risky behaviors that are clearly safer than others. Harm reduction affirms that people themselves are the primary agents of reducing the harms of their behaviors through providing culturally and need-appropriate information, materials and services. Harm Reduction seeks to empower persons to share information and support each other in strategies which meet the actual conditions of their drug use or risky behaviors.
3. Harm Reduction requires a non-judgmental relationship with the client. Harm Reduction accepts that substance use and other risky behaviors are a part of many people's lives and focuses on minimizing harmful effects rather than ignoring or condemning those behaviors. A non-judgmental, non-coercive approach is essential.
4. Harm Reduction is client-centered and aims to meet participant where they are in terms of their behaviors. Client-centered counseling focuses on the concerns and interests of the client or participant. Intervention strategies are tailored to meet the needs and ability of the participant and success is achieved through the setting of self-identified, attainable goals.