CALL TO ACTION

Public Libraries and the Opioid Crisis

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Call to Action: Public Libraries and the Opioid Crisis

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PREFACE

Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and the Public Library Association have conducted research into how public libraries are supporting their communities through the opioid crisis, and how libraries are partnering with organizations to meet local needs.

This Call to Action is the culminating output for this project and provides five categories of action items to generate ideas and options for how public libraries can engage in opioid response activities. The research also has resulted in a summary report and eight research-based case studies highlighting varying opioid response efforts across the US. Additional information about the project can be found online at oc.lc/opioid-crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are respected local institutions that connect community members to credible information and services. Libraries are open to all, including those who may be in crisis. As community anchor institutions, libraries are leveraging their assets in response to the opioid crisis that has gripped the country. High-profile national news stories and recent research from the project Public Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities have featured libraries' responses, ranging from providing access to information and resources on addiction, prevention, treatment, and recovery support, to training staff to use the drug naloxone to help reverse overdoses.[1]

For many libraries, the new and urgent demand created by this public health crisis is paired with uncertainty on how best to address local needs in this area. In September 2017, OCLC's WebJunction and the Public Library Association (PLA) hosted a virtual town hall on the opioid epidemic with library leaders and community organizations.[2] Nearly half of the 952 registered attendees said their libraries had not developed responses or were not sure if their library had responded to the crisis. A follow-up survey three months later highlighted participants' desire for more information, tools, and recommendations for how they can approach the issue appropriately and safely.

This call to action was created as a direct result of that request from library staff and has been informed by case study research and cross-sector discussions with library leaders and library front line staff, as well as national and local community partner organizations. Two themes from the research and discussions stand out: there are many options for addressing this crisis, and it is vital to do *something*. The goal of this guide is to provide library staff with options and ideas to support their communities through this crisis. In the case study research, interviewees from public libraries and their community partners noted that even a small first step together made a critical difference. We encourage all readers to consider one action they may take in the coming months that can help improve local access to information and resources as we navigate these challenges.

Life Skills Curriculum class being held at the Blount County Public Library.
Courtesy: Blount County Public Library

Action 1: Explore Your Community Data

Understanding the health concerns that impact your community, including the opioid crisis, is essential to informing the community, leadership, and other stakeholders about local needs and planning potential service responses. Exploring a range of health-related community needs also can become part of the library's ongoing strategic planning.

A great place to start is with County Health Rankings & Roadmaps,[3] a tool funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The site compiles data from sources such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, and the U.S. Census Bureau to provide a local snapshot and statewide ranking on many health-related issues. The data includes a wide range of data points such as rates of access to health care, social and economic factors such as poverty and graduation rates, as well as data on specific health issues such as diabetes, HIV prevalence, and drug overdose deaths.

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TIPS FOR SUCCESS

A quick data point to explore is the county-level data showing opioid prescribing and overdose rates around the country from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[4]

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Libraries can also connect with local and/or state health department staff to discuss what issues they are tracking in the community. Staff of health agencies/departments are the most common library partner in addressing the opioid crisis, and they can be a source for understanding local health priorities and opportunities and may have resources for the library to distribute to the community. The broader priorities could be helpful in determining areas of alignment and support for the library and partners in the community. Priorities that surface through data collection and discussions can also help the library with collection development and adding resources that are of interest or need to the community.

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Conducting a survey or a deeper community needs assessment is another way to gather and review data as you consider how to support your community. Data can be a powerful asset when advocating for programming or training, but this doesn't have to be a complex process. While it's always important to be thoughtful and intentional when surveying the community, it can also be a time-bound and simple activity that could include speaking to patrons about their experiences and health needs. Informal conversations with community members and stakeholders can help to inform your approach and surface aligned initiatives or activities.

Resources to explore[5]:

- County Health Rankings & Roadmaps—Use the Data will walk you through exploring your community data in the tool

- Centers for Disease Control, Drug Overdose Death Rate Maps shows the overdose rate per county across the country. The overdose rate is just one aspect of the overall issue, however, and a low overdose rate should not be a deterrent to providing programming and services. Libraries can support community events and programs that play an important role in ongoing prevention and awareness activities

- Gaining skills in assessment and surveys:
    - PLA provides a compilation of "datasets about public libraries, public datasets that have a library element included in them, or census-like data sites that could help library staff gather information about their communities"
    - WebJunction resources on Assessment, Evaluation & Planning
    - WebJunction webinar, Library Surveys for Success

Action 2: Consider Community Assets and Connect with Partners

Partnerships can increase capacity, funding, and strength, particularly around topics of shared concern such as the opioid crisis. By partnering with organizations like public health departments or nonprofits that specialize in issues like substance use disorder and/or harm reduction, libraries can gain access to subject matter experts, programming opportunities, and connect to local nonlibrary users.

Looking to discover new partners? The community asset mapping process, which is defined in the Community-Led Libraries Toolkit, is an exercise that "focuses on learning about the organized or formal groups in a community. It helps you learn about the services provided in the community and identify potential community partners, providing a launch pad for you to enter the community."[6] The process can help identify organizations and coalitions in the community that already are supporting work on the opioid crisis. Aligning with existing efforts helps to limit silos that can emerge when many organizations and individuals are working (independently) toward solutions to important issues and concerns. Seeking opportunities for the library to participate and contribute also helps to increase the visibility of the library as a powerful partner, particularly when these opportunities are led by local government. Local coalitions are a good place to start.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

As you seek to understand how a crisis is impacting your community, incorporate the perspectives of individuals with lived experience. Reach out to local recovery groups and harm reduction organizations; they may be able to provide expertise, training, and partnership support.

Initial steps could include starting a conversation with potential community partners or subject matter experts. Ask where they see gaps or opportunities for shared work. Listen to what partners identify as needs and highlight what the library can offer and support. Encourage potential partner organizations to meet at your library and include details about their events on the library's website; this initial engagement could lead to greater connection and familiarity with the library. If there are community-wide coalitions to address the crisis or substance abuse issues, find a place for the library to participate.

Share with partners the strengths that a library can bring to a collaboration:

- A trusted organization that reaches diverse community members
- Physical space for meetings
- A safe, nonstigmatized place for people to talk about difficult issues
- Marketing reach for programs

- Vetted topical resources, including books, journals, and databases
- Staff knowledgeable in curating and connecting people with community resources

Contributions that could be accessed through partners may include:

Deterra bags distributed by the Twinsburg Public Library.
Courtesy: Twinsburg Public Library

- Specialized resources geared toward specific population groups (e.g., youth or multilingual materials)
- Subject matter experts that can provide training to library staff and/or patrons and/or participate in library programs or events
- In-kind donations (e.g., Deterra bags or naloxone)
- Connecting with individuals with lived experience
- Collaborating on funding requests to better address shared needs and priorities
- Advocating for library programs and services in the community

Resources to explore[7]:

- [Community-Led Libraries Toolkit](#) can guide you through the asset mapping process
- [Neighborhood Navigator](#) is a geo mapping tool for identifying local resources that can address social determinants of health. The service is provided by the American Association of Family Physicians. Libraries also can [submit programs for inclusion](#) in the mapping tool so that others can become aware of your services
  - [Aunt Bertha](#) is a complementary Neighborhood Navigator project that focuses on free or reduced cost services like medical care, food, and job training. Libraries can also submit their programs for inclusion in this list
- [Collective Impact](#) is a specific approach for organizations to work together around a common agenda, working toward shared measurements, coordinated activities, and engaging in continuous communication. Public libraries are participating in collective impact efforts in cities including [Denver](#), Colorado, and Dayton, Ohio, as the cities seek to make measurable impact in the opioid crisis. Collective impact is used to approach many different community concerns and could highlight potential partners for the library

- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) offers resources on starting community coalitions as well as identifying community needs
  - [Assessment Primer: Describing Your Community, Collecting Data, Analyzing the Issues and Establishing a Road Map for Change](#)
  - [Handbook for Community Anti-Drug Coalitions](#)

Barrington Public Library promotes a community book discussion in partnership with the BAY Team.
Courtesy: Barrington Public Library

- Capacity Primer: Building Membership, Structure and Leadership

- Connect with local chapters of health and social services professional organizations; for example, the National Association of Social Workers may be able to support the library with resources to engage in your health programming and opioid response

- 3 Ways to Build Partnerships at Your Small Library, State Library of Iowa via *Programming Librarian*

- WebJunction's resources on Partnerships & Collaboration

- TechSoup for Libraries, Compatible Library Partners Chart

- Maps for Community Organizing toolkit from the Advancement Project

Action 3: Increase Awareness and Knowledge of the Issue Among Staff and the Community

Learning and training opportunities for library staff and board—as well as the larger community—can increase understanding and confidence in addressing this crisis. In their Opioid Use Disorder Prevention Playbook, the National Interoperability Collaborative maintains that removing the stigma associated with opioids is a key concern: "if the environment of interaction by professionals (police, health care providers, etc.) can be become more nondiscriminatory and non-judgmental, there is a higher probability that the road to recovery will be shorter and more likely to result in a positive outcome."[8] Library staff are professionals who can connect individuals with information on a wide range of health-related topics, including to resources that support recovery and treatment options or understanding substance use disorder. By working toward reducing stigma on this issue, libraries can be part of a community-wide solution.

Also be aware that any given issue may affect people and communities differently. Be it youth, grandparents, persons of color—the needs of each group can vary, and responses can be customized to support them. Aligning with organizations that are focused on meeting the needs of specific demographics can provide the library with additional expertise and community reach.

Resources to explore[9]:

- Trauma-informed care in libraries

  - Public Library Social Work—Overview of Trauma-Informed Care, Public Library Association

  - Trauma-Informed Libraries Facebook group: "We are a collaborative of library professionals and library supporters who seek to share ACEs [Adverse Childhood Experiences] Science with our institutions, organizations and communities; explore and implement Trauma-Informed approaches; and build community resilience through our programs, practices and publications"

  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) resources on Trauma-Informed Approach

- Mental Health First Aid is a course that covers how to help someone experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. The training helps learners to identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses. Library staff and the public can participate in trainings scheduled throughout the country; libraries can also consider working with organizations to host training at the library

- Reducing and removing language that can be stigmatizing is helpful on many levels. How we refer to and describe individuals who are in crisis—experiencing issues like substance use disorder, mental health, or homelessness—can impact how our communities and colleagues see these people. It's important to remember that many people, including our friends and colleagues, may be afraid of talking about these issues if they feel judgment or stigma. We can all take the lead in using language that helps to remove these barriers. This approach can be incorporated into the library's customer service policy

  - [Language Matters](#), Addiction Policy Forum

  - [Addiction-ary](#), Recovery Research Institute

  - [Words matter: How language choice can reduce stigma](#), Faces and Voices of Recovery

  - [Stigma Reducing Language](#), Shatterproof

Better understanding the facts about the opioid crisis is helpful for setting the context for a response. Here are just a few:

- On average, 130 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose[10]

- Of 12- to 17-year-olds who misused prescription opioids, 57% got them from a friend or relative[11]

- Roughly 21% to 29% of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain misuse them[12]

- The genes that people are born with account for about half of a person's risk for addiction[13]

- A large-scale national study showed that opioid overdose deaths decreased by 14% in states after they enacted naloxone access laws[14]

Information and videos about substance use disorder and opioids for a general audience:

- Addiction Policy Forum, [What is Addiction](#)

- Addiction Policy Forum, [Addiction A-Z](#)

- Addiction Policy Forum, [collection of videos](#)

Action 4: Focus on Library Staff Care

It's important to acknowledge that for many library staff, supporting patrons on challenging topics can surface deep emotions. *Compassion fatigue* is described by The American Institute of Stress as "the emotional residue or strain of exposure to working with those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events. It differs from burn-out, but can co-exist."[15] Compassion fatigue is an issue for library staff and surfaces with other topics, as well. For example, during the Great Recession library staff experienced compassion fatigue from helping people locate information related to filing for unemployment, assistance programs, housing options, and job seeking.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Staff may be eligible to access support through an employee assistance program (EAP), which is a benefit provided through a health insurance provider. Prior to an incident occurring, determine if this type of coverage is available.

Acknowledging that issues like responding to the opioid crisis or having a health epidemic in your community can lead to compassion fatigue is an important aspect of anticipating staff needs.

Create a post-crisis plan: Have a plan in place to support staff and patrons in the event a traumatic event or crisis occurs at the library. How will the library support staff who were affected? A post-crisis plan will prepare the library to respond to an event like witnessing an overdose as well as if/when patrons or colleagues suffer another type of health crisis or trauma.

If your library does have to respond to an overdose, regardless of whether staff had to intervene or emergency personnel arrived first, consider what support can be provided to staff or public who may have witnessed the event, such as the opportunity to speak with a counselor. Some health insurance plans include the opportunity to speak with a counselor by phone. Talk to the local health department for recommendations on supporting individuals and the community; they may be able to provide access to social workers and/or counselors.

Check with the health department or other support resources *before* a crisis occurs to alleviate pressure to find an option when the need arises.

Resources to explore[16]:
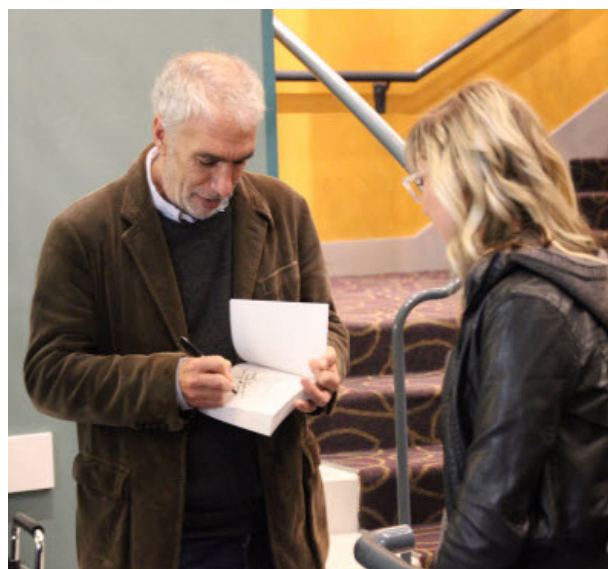
- Elissa Hardy, the Community Resource Specialist at Denver Public Library, offered a webinar through the Massachusetts Library System addressing compassion fatigue in libraries

- Infopeople produced the webinar, "Preventing and Treating Compassion Fatigue with Self-Care" which is available through the WebJunction Course Catalog

Action 5: Offer Community Engagement and Programming Options

Programming and training opportunities can help to increase awareness of the impact of the opioid crisis to the community and increase the confidence of library staff and patrons in responding to surfacing needs. Partners can be particularly helpful in supporting these training needs, providing subject matter experts, resources, and marketing support.

There are many opportunities, ranging from low touch through to a deeper engagement, which can be adapted for your local capacity and needs[17]:
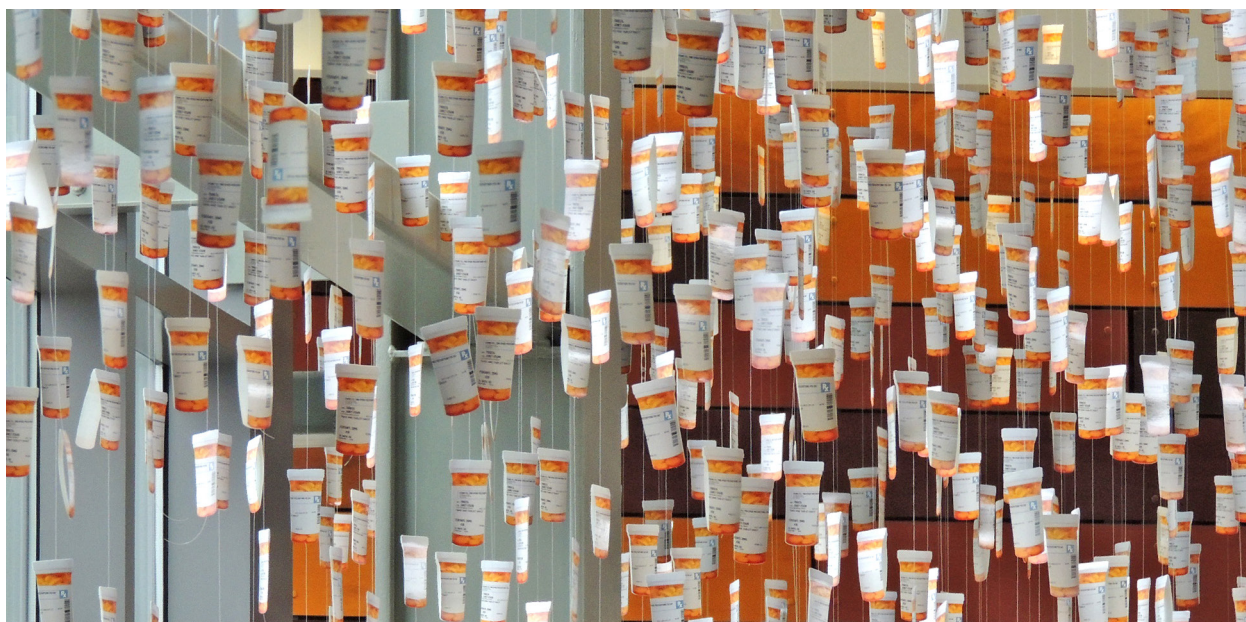
- Provide informational displays with books available at the library

- Update the library's website with resources that can support patron information needs

- Distribute free pamphlets addressing substance use disorder

- Host a guest speaker, film screening, or a book discussion

- Host a community forum or conversation

- Promote drug take-back events in the community (generally offered by a partner) that help to safely dispose of unwanted

David Sheff, author of *Beautiful Boy* and *Clean,* at a community event at the Everett Public Library.
Courtesy: Everett Public Library

and unneeded medication, preventing misuse or abuse. The Drug Enforcement Agency maintains a list of local organizations that collect medications

- Make Deterra bags available to aid in the prevention of opioid misuse by providing a way for people to easily and safely dispose of unwanted medications. For example, the Twinsburg (OH) Public Library distributes the Deterra bags to the community through their engagement with the Summit County Community Partnership

- Peer navigators or peer providers offer support on a variety of mental and physical health issues, and have lived experience. Libraries such as Kalamazoo (MI) Public Library and Denver Public Library have included peer navigators to aid in supporting patrons with social service needs. While this is a high-touch initiative, it can be well supported by external partners who provide peer navigators. The Kalamazoo Public Library and their partners at the Recovery Institute of Southwest Michigan started their program with just a few hours of peer navigation support per week, but they were able to later expand the program as they shared the impact with stakeholders and secured additional funding

- Engage with a public awareness campaign, such as Use Only as Directed in Utah, which the Salt Lake County Library joined. As you speak with the health department, ask about any campaigns for engaging the public on health topics the library could support

Use Only as Directed pill bottle display at Salt Lake County Library.
Courtesy: Salt Lake County Library

Consider program evaluation: Along with any partners, consider how to capture information about how the library is meeting community needs. Because of the sensitivity of the topic, collecting evaluation forms or other data from attendees may be particularly challenging. If statistical data isn't possible, review options for collecting anecdotal data from presenters, partners, etc., which can aid in sharing the results with stakeholders. Participating in larger community coalitions that are focused on the crisis may be another source of sharing impact.

Sustainability: When considering a response, also factor in the importance of sustainability. What will be needed to maintain the programming or service moving forward? Depending on the type of response, sustainability may be less of an issue. For example, book displays and providing informational pamphlets may require a minimal sustainability consideration. While a library may

have limited capacity to offer a long-term response through programming or staffing changes, it's still possible to move forward; a limited response can better help to define needs and ongoing requirements. When working with partners, ask about their ability to assist in supporting the cost of implementation and delivery.
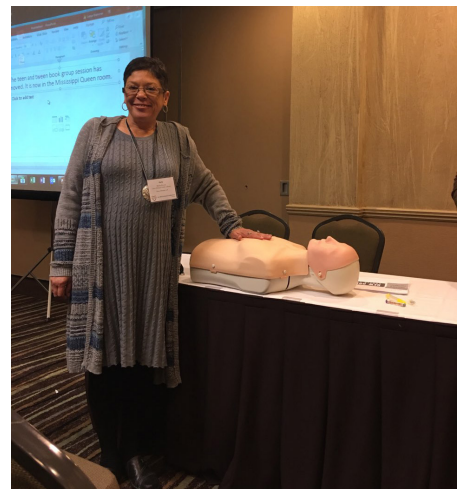
FOCUS ON NALOXONE[18]

Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose, and stocking naloxone and administering it in the event of an overdose in the library is one of the most common responses that surfaced in the case study research for this project. Sold under the brand name Narcan, many libraries host training on using naloxone for both the staff and public.

Training: Naloxone training may include how to reverse an overdose, when it should be administered, and why it's important to have available. Calling 911 should always be the first step after recognizing an emergency, but minutes can count when it comes to saving a life. The training can also address information about how opioid misuse affects individuals and the community, as well as help to break down bias about the use of naloxone. The local health department can be a good partner in providing access to this training and more information about the use of naloxone.

Many libraries have approached this as an optional training for staff to allow people to choose to participate and to help build buy-in among staff. In addition to making training optional, offering the training multiple times allows staff who may have been hesitant about the training to hear firsthand from colleagues about the value of the content. Scheduling refresher sessions annually will allow new employees and those who were previously unable to attend to participate, as well.

Staff member at New Orleans Public Library prepares for Bystander Response Training.
Courtesy: New Orleans Public Library

The New Orleans Public Library combined naloxone training with CPR and Stop the Bleed as part of their Bystander Response Training to prepare people for a crisis; the training is available to both the staff and public. This training has been made possible through the library's partnership with the local health department, which developed the curriculum and provides the trainers and equipment needed for the sessions.

More information about using naloxone is available[19]:

- Next Naloxone facilitates naloxone access

- Get Naloxone Now, "online resource to train people to respond effectively to an opioid overdose emergency"

- How Naloxone Saves Lives in Opioid Overdose, a YouTube video produced by the U.S. National Library of Medicine

- Harm Reduction Coalition, Training Materials

- Harm Reduction Coalition, Overdose Videos

Legality: Library staff and members of the community have expressed liability concerns over naloxone administration in the event that an opioid reversal fails or the individual who received the naloxone has an adverse reaction. Every state has some form of a Good Samaritan law, which provides protection when individuals aid in an emergency. However, with regard to dispensing, carrying, and administering naloxone, each state differs on what situations apply to these laws. Your library may have access to support from a local attorney as part of your connection to local government. It is recommended to confirm what policies are in place for employees of other agencies as a starting point for the library's policy.

Resources for Good Samaritan laws[20]:

- National Center for Biotechnology Information, Good Samaritan Laws

- National Center for Biotechnology Information, Opioid-overdose laws association with opioid use and overdose mortality, from 2014: "Laws designed to increase layperson engagement in opioid-overdose reversal were associated with reduced opioid-overdose mortality. We found no evidence that these measures were associated with increased non-medical opioid use"

- Prescription Drug Abuse Policy System, Naloxone Overdose Prevention Laws

Examples of naloxone policies and procedures for libraries[21]:

- New York State Library

- Denver Public Library

Naloxone for libraries: The makers of Narcan offer two free doses to public libraries.[22] Libraries have also obtained naloxone through other sources, such as the local health department.

Additional Resources

General[23]:

- Health Resources for Public Libraries, National Network of Libraries of Medicine

- Opioid Response Network provides access to vetted prevention, treatment, and recovery consultants nationwide; anyone can request training, education, technical assistance

- C4 Innovations provides training and technical assistance on topics relating to the opioid crisis, including naloxone, prevention, trauma informed care (for a fee, except for those eligible for MassHealth technical assistance)

- AmeriCorps (Recovery Corps in some states) volunteers can assist with prevention/drug education, medication takeback, serving as recovery coaches. Also review the publication, Taking Action to Combat the Opioid Crisis

- Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

- SAMHSA's National Helpline is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and Spanish) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders

- Faces & Voices of Recovery, national organization representing numerous local recovery organizations. See list of local affiliates for possible partnership and engagement opportunities

Example evaluation toolkits[24]:

- RAND Suicide Prevention Program Evaluation Toolkit

- Project Outcome, Public Library Association

Conclusion

There are many paths that can be taken to support your community through this and any crisis. Think about how to apply the strengths of the library in approaching the issue and seek out the support of partners with expertise to help address gaps that may exist. The message of "get in where you fit in" is important for libraries, library staff, and their communities. There is a role to play in improving outcomes that align well with the mission of the public library. Together, we can make a positive difference in improving outcomes for our communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In fall 2019, representatives from libraries and library support organizations and from non-profit organizations and professional associations involved in responding to the opioid crisis participated in online discussions to provide feedback on the project research and inform the call-to-action recommendations. These participants generously shared resources and information to help libraries with their responses to this crisis.

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www.cadca.org
www.cadca.org/resources/handbook-community
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www.harmreduction.org
www.faithinharmreduction.org

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www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources
/resource-library/

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NOTES

1. Allen, Scott G., Larra Clark, Michele Coleman, Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Chris Cyr, Kendra Morgan, and Mercy Procaccini. 2019. Libraries Respond to the Opioid Crisis with Their Communities: Summary Report. Dublin, OH: OCLC. https://doi.org/10.25333/qgrn-hj36.

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