

# Bridges of Trust: Weaving Harm Reduction Into Community Hubs

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# BRIDGES OF TRUST

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## Weaving Harm Reduction into Community Hubs

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Substance Use Initiatives

Onondaga County Health Department

September 2025

**ongovhealth**  
Onondaga County  
Health Department



# Our Mission

The Onondaga County Health Department's Substance Use Initiatives works to ensure that individuals, families, and communities impacted by substance use have access to prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery services.



# Where We Started



- The program has grown from a single staff person beginning in 2017 to becoming its own Division with 15 staff members as of September 2025.
- What began as community Narcan training has now evolved into five separate programs.
- Large grant from NACCHO started us on the path to expansion, now leveraging opioid settlement dollars.





# Substance Use Initiatives: Our Programs

- Syringe Services Program
- Peer Engagement Services
- Health Education
- Naloxone Training and Distribution
- Crisis Response and Outreach
- Substance Use Support Services



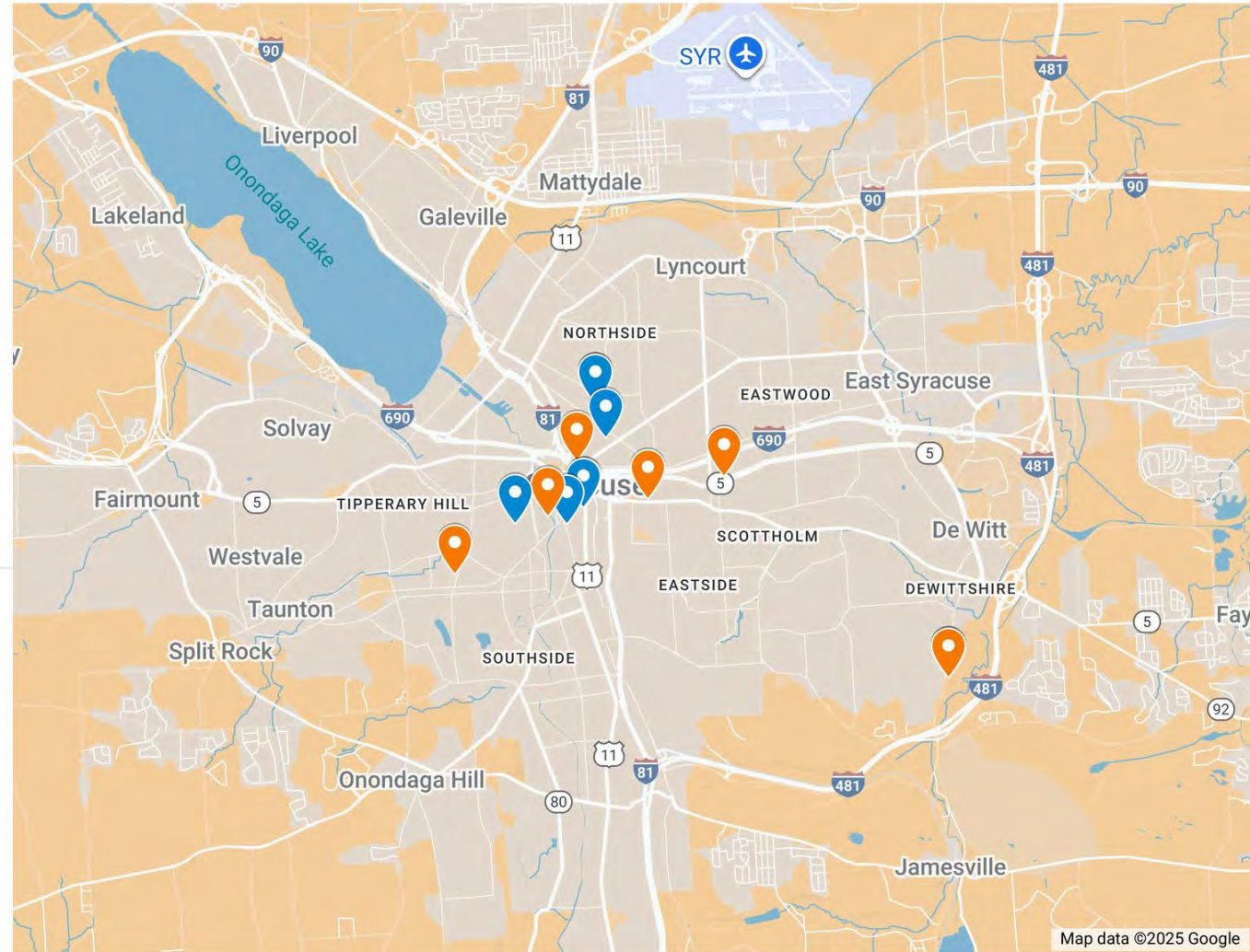
# SUI Locations

## SSP Locations

- White Branch Library
- Samaritan Center
- Mundy Branch Library
- Catholic Charities
- University United Methodist Church
- Rescue Mission Men And Womens Shelter
- Community Library of DeWitt & Jamesville

## Outreach Locations

- Community Library of DeWitt & Jamesville
- White Branch Library
- Onondaga County Probation Department
- Onondaga County Department of Social Services - Economic Security
- Centro Transit Hub
- Victory Temple Church
- St. Lucy's Catholic Church



# Naloxone Training and Distribution

- Naloxone training was the gateway to the growth of our initiatives.
- Began with trainings for community organizations, government agencies public trainings, has evolved into mailing, naloxoboxes, street distribution and more.

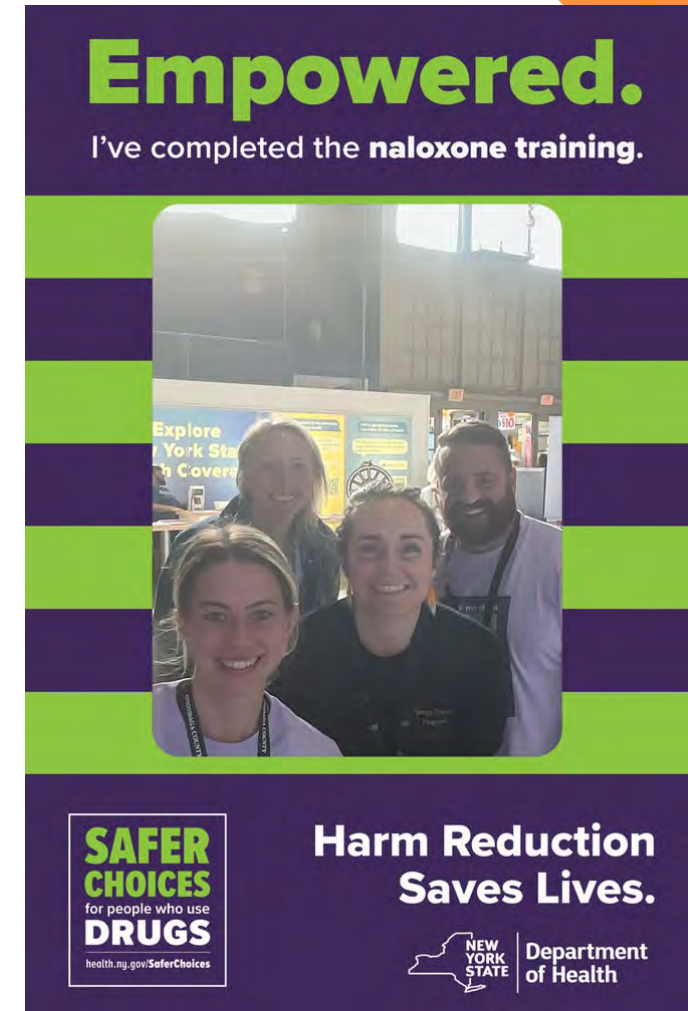




# Health Education: What We Do

Health Educator's responsibilities are:

- Conducting recurring and one-off community naloxone trainings
- Distribution and education on harm reduction supplies
- Educational and Promotional Material Development
- Managing the online on-demand training with a mailing option
- Managing the harm reduction supply confidential phone line
- Tabling and networking events





# Health Education in the Community

Health Education is the public-facing element of the program that generates goodwill with the community at large.

- Builds trust and credibility with community members
- Reduces stigma around substance use and harm reduction services
- Encourages partnerships with local organizations and leaders
- Increases visibility and acceptance of our program
- Creates shared ownership of community health solutions



# Syringe Services Program: What We Do

- Maintains a consistent schedule at 7 locations throughout Onondaga County
- Distributes syringes, wound care essentials, naloxone, hygiene items, socks, additional safer-use supplies, and other basic needs items
- Nurse Practitioner provides on-site evaluations, wound care, Suboxone prescribing, and other acute care needs.
- Staffed by a Community Health Counselor and a Peer Specialist to address concerns and goals of participants
- Syringe Cleanup and Disposal Provided



# Syringe Services Program

## Found a Syringe on Public Property?



Call the Onondaga County  
Health Department at  
**315-418-5365**



Substance Use  
Initiatives

## If you pick up a discarded syringe, do the following:

- Wear gloves and use tongs or a dustpan.
- Place the syringe in a sharps container or hard plastic bottle with a secure lid, such as a laundry detergent bottle.
- Label container "sharps" with tape before you throw it away.
- Wash your hands with soap and clean the equipment you used to pick up the syringe.



# Syringe Services Program in the Community

- SSP intentionally developed for established hotspots at strategic partner locations.
- Leveraged existing relationships to establish our sites
- Next steps for additional sites:
  - Identified established community sites that are already part of the landscape of the people we serve
  - Where do they meet their basic needs?
  - Where do they already feel comfortable?
  - Where do they connect?



# Peer Engagement Services: What We Do

- Team of 4 CRPA's
- Peer Engagement Specialists "professional friends" who accompany our participants as they take new steps in their journey
- Participate with SSP and Nurse Practitioner
- Embedded throughout the community to provide immediate support in high need areas
- Community Outreach



# Peer Engagement Services: In the Community

- Match Peer Specialists to sites that utilize specific skillsets and experiences
- SSP always staffed to familiarize clients in a low-threshold way
- Embedded at libraries, DSS, Drug Court, soon Probation



# Substance Use Crisis Response and Outreach Team: What We Do

- Crisis Response and Outreach is available on-call for substance use crisis response from 8AM-7PM, M-F
- Overdose response, drug use behaviors, behavioral and emotional concerns, active safety checks, lack of transition planning
- Part of a community crisis network; non-law enforcement response
- Harm Reduction supply distribution, relationship building, linkages to resources & treatment, advocacy, focused transportation



# Substance Use Crisis Response and Outreach Team

- Relationships with community agencies to establish trust and develop working partnerships with:
  - AMR
  - Centro bus hub
  - Syracuse Downtown Security
  - Libraries
  - DSS
  - Probation
  - Justice Center
  - Corner stores
  - Hospitals
  - Churches
  - Other social service agencies



# Substance Use Support Services: What We Do



- Person centered, nonjudgmental and responsive case management for individuals who are currently using or have a history of substance use
- Hands-on support as participants navigate systems, work towards their individual goals and build pathways towards health, stability and hope
- Service Navigator, Transitional Case Manager, Intensive Case Manager and Peer assist in navigating systems



# Substance Use Support Services: In the Community



- Currently embedded at the Department of Social Services in the waiting room
- Building relationships with jail, probation and parole
- Leveraging internal referrals from our own programs and community connections as we build the program

- Expanded access to resources
- Trust and engagement
- Resource sharing
- Coordinated response
- Advocacy power
- Program sustainability

# How do partnerships benefit us?





# Bridges of Trust

- Partnerships are strategically built with agencies and groups that are touchpoints for our population
- Allowed us to not start from scratch on relationship building
- Helped us reach populations we may not have been able to otherwise
- Partnering with trusted community agencies helped establish a good reputation with the public and other agencies
- Given us access to a broad set of resources for the people we serve
- Building a network of partners is more essential than ever in light of unstable funding streams, an unclear future for social safety nets, and the re-demonization of harm reduction
- “Addiction is the opposite of connection.”





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# Questions?

Ask us anything!

