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Substance Use and Overdose in Public Libraries

During 2021, Florida reported 8,171 overdose deaths, a 7.57% increase from the prior year. Nationally, there were 107,622 overdose deaths in 2021, a 15% increase. Because of the ongoing, overdose crisis, researchers are investigating new avenues to reach people who use drugs that may be at risk of an overdose. A recent article in the Journal of Community Health (available for free in the link below), shows results of a survey among 356 libraries across 5 states – Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Michigan, and Virginia – to assess the impact of overdoses in public libraries as well as staff attitudes, willingness to engage with people who use drugs, and library policies. Data were collected between August 2018 and May 2019.

Table 1: On-site substance use, and overdose reported in libraries

	CT	FL	CO	VA	MI
Alcohol	54%	52%	47%	45%	39%
Drug injection	7%	14%	36%	12%	11%
Overdose	11%	17%	14%	12%	10%

Results (Table 1) indicate that Florida library staff reported alcohol use (52%) and drug injection (14%) on-site and 17% reported an overdose occurring on-site within the past year. By comparison, 36% of library staff

Table 2: Library policies and practices to address on-site substance use

	CT	FL	CO	VA	MI
Naloxone stocked on-site	14%	0%	33%	17%	8%
Restroom monitoring or time limits	7%	3%	6%	5%	10%
Safe syringe disposal facilities	4%	3%	33%	2%	2%
Formal guidelines for intervening when people are using substances in the library	4%	12%	14%	14%	7%

in Colorado reported on-site drug injection, but only 14% reported an on-site overdose. There were also differences between library policies and practices (Table 2). One-third of Colorado library staff reported keeping naloxone on-site as did smaller percentages of staff from other states, compared to 0% in Florida. Safe syringe disposal was reported by 33% of Colorado library staff, compared to 3% in Florida. Additional findings indicate that Florida staff reported the lowest level of support for stocking naloxone in libraries and 36% of Florida staff reported library patrons requesting assistance with finding drug and alcohol treatment services. 91% of staff from all states indicated a desire to receive training to address substance use.

Library staff are interested in receiving training to help patrons who use drugs, and this is especially relevant in Florida which had the highest proportion of staff indicating requests for help and the highest proportion of staff reporting on-site overdoses. Partnering with or offering additional support to libraries may represent an opportunity to reduce overdoses in states with high burdens of overdose deaths, like Florida.

Sources: CDC Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>;
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10900-021-01048-2>

Broward Briefings may be copied. Please cite United Way of Broward County Commission on Behavioral Health & Drug Prevention.