

Reimagining Overdose Prevention Among Black and Latino People in Baltimore City and Washington County Who Use Drugs

Background

Since 2010, the number of opioid overdose deaths in Maryland has quadrupled. During the COVID-19 pandemic, more Marylanders died in 2020 from overdose than in any previous year. Maryland overdose deaths continue to disproportionately impact Black and Latino populations. For example, in 2020, Black individuals represented 39% of people who died of opioid overdose, while representing only 30.7% of the population in Maryland. In the same year, overdose deaths increased among Hispanic Marylanders by 68%.

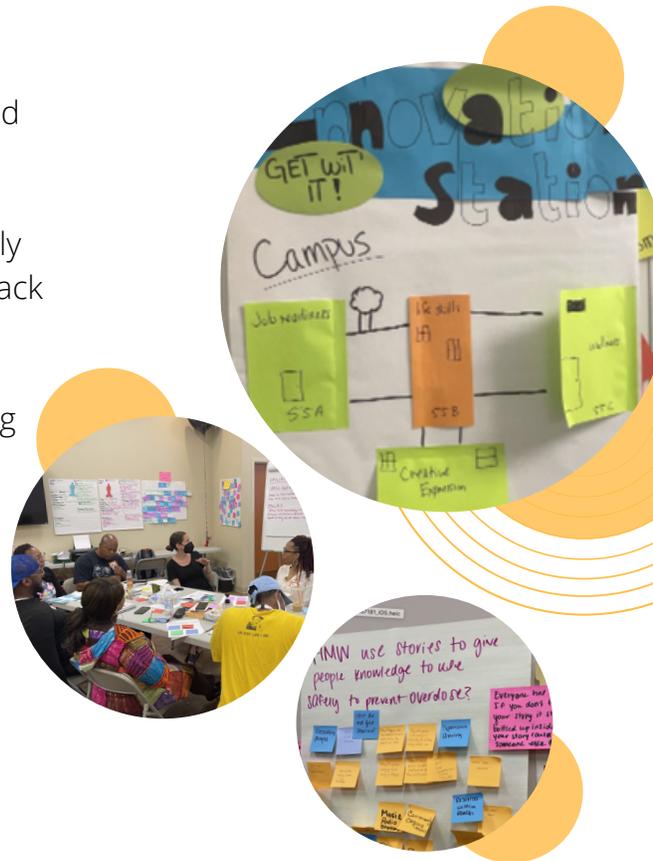
Project Purpose

Develop a person-centered, harm reduction communication campaign that effectively engages Black and Latino people who use drugs in overdose education and connects them to community resources in Maryland.

Our Approach

The Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs (CCP) and Maryland Department of Health hosted three hackathons to brainstorm solutions to prevent opioid-related overdoses, specifically among Black and Latino people living in Baltimore City and Washington County, Maryland.

A hackathon brings together a diverse group of people to learn and work in teams and develop innovative solutions that address tough issues creatively in a short period of time.



Twenty-five individuals volunteered to participate in one of three hackathons, which took place between January and June 2023 in Baltimore City and Washington County, Maryland. Facilitators guided participants through creative and interactive activities to share their experiences related to opioid use. Using that information, participants then brainstormed innovative concepts that could be used in their communities to reduce overdose deaths.

Results

Three innovative solutions emerged as the most promising concepts for a communication campaign to reduce opioid-related deaths in Baltimore City and Washington County.

- **Get With It: A key insight that emerged from the hackathons is people who use drugs want to be more than just their drug use.** They are interested in gaining knowledge and skills throughout their life course — with support and without risk of judgment. Gaining knowledge and skills is empowering and will have a positive impact on their safer drug use. This concept can be extended to another important insight around their desire to learn harm reduction techniques, specifically related to drug use. The call to action is to “Get With It” in whatever way is important to the person at that specific time in their life.
- **This is My Story: This concept is in response to workshop participants’ insights that people with lived and living experiences have power and benefit from hearing and sharing personal stories (storytelling).** Hearing and sharing stories are ways to feel valued, important, and connected to others and, in doing so, address isolation. Personal stories can also highlight faith and hope. The storytelling concept acknowledges that people are at different places in their own drug use or recovery journeys, and harm reduction may look different depending on where people are on their journey. The call to action is to practice and/or learn more about harm reduction strategies.
- **Faith Leadership Outreach: There is a desire to engage church leadership in learning about harm reduction and becoming a resource for community members who need information or services.** This concept highlights the clergy/religious leaders’ role and influence in de-stigmatizing people who need help. There is a lack of resources in the community for harm reduction, and the existing power and influence of religious institutions to include a disease-based approach to prevent overdose as a way to care for the community.

Key Insights

- People who use drugs want to be more than just their drug use. They are interested in gaining knowledge and skills throughout their life course — with support and without risk of judgment.
- People with lived and living experiences have power and benefit from hearing and sharing personal stories (storytelling).
- There is a strong desire to learn harm reduction techniques, specifically related to drug use.
- There is a lack of harm reduction resources in the Latinx community.
- There is an existing power and influence of faith-based institutions. Faith leaders can support a disease-based approach to prevent overdose to care for their community members and reduce stigma.
- There is an opportunity to bolster existing structures and enthusiasm for service to include overdose prevention as part of caring for the community.
- It's important to introduce a more compassionate and disease-based approach to overdose prevention to reduce shame and isolation among people who use drugs.
- Everyone has a story. If you don't tell your story, it stays bottled up inside, but your story could help someone else.
- Hopelessness is a major barrier to getting help.
- Having peers and a community/support system is important for recovery. Connecting with others is therapeutic.
- There is a need for more empathy in the medical system to reduce stigma related to drug use.
- Failed health systems create even more barriers and challenges for people who use drugs.
- People benefit from safe spaces to share their stories, make connections, build community, and feel valued and important.

Concepts and messaging from these solutions will be further developed and pre-tested with participants from the hackathons and community members; they will eventually be used to develop and implement a communication campaign in Baltimore City and Washington County.

For More Information About this Project:

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Learn More

More information about the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Program's Human-Centered Design work is available at ccp.jhu.edu



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