

Improving our response to substance use disorder

The Pathways To Recovery Act will create a new way for Washington to address substance use disorder and related activities, treating these as health issues requiring care and support, including pre-treatment outreach, treatment, and recovery support services for suffering individuals.

Old methods of arrest and incarceration do not work

In 2018, 1,302 people in Washington died from an overdose, marking a 24 percent increase in a decade¹. Criminalization has been ineffective as a response to substance use disorder, causing more hurt and creating barriers to recovery. Law enforcement teams are neither equipped nor trained to provide social services, treatment or care; it is unreasonable to expect them to do so.

Furthermore, incarceration does not treat substance use disorder or its root causes. The diagnostic criteria for substance use disorder includes continued use despite negative consequences. It is inconceivable to presume, with this, that further negative consequences, like incarceration or fines, would lead to recovery. Addressing substance use disorder as a crime has failed to improve public safety,² while disproportionately impacting our Black, Brown, Indigenous, Asian and other marginalized communities.³

Give individuals pathways to recovery that are known to work

A clear pathway to recovery for individuals is required. This includes focusing on the unique needs of individuals, providing professional and experienced support, and a community that will invest in this recovery. It requires hope.

Create safe and healthy communities

People need their communities' support, and in turn, our communities are strengthened by having healthy people. When we invest in individuals to reach recovery, we improve our communities by making them a safer environment for us all.

There is national, regional, and local support for creating a real solution.

In 2020, Oregon voters overwhelmingly passed similar legislation. Washington can build from this momentum and shift to a more health-based and data driven approach. Several Washington-state coalitions,

¹ https://adai.washington.edu/WAdata/major_drug_deaths.htm

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4800748/>

³ <https://www.aclu.org/other/race-war-drugs>

including Treatment First Washington and Care First Washington, have garnered statewide support for enacting new policies to ensure our public health system can provide better safety and health outcomes.

The Pathways to Recovery Act is both **common sense and transformational**.

It accomplishes the following:

- **Creates and implements a statewide substance use recovery plan** to be developed by experts in the fields of health and safety and individuals with personal experience in recovery from substance use disorders. They will help design a plan for delivering comprehensive pre-treatment outreach, treatment, and recovery support services.
- **Decriminalizes personal use amounts of drug possession** by creating a new public health framework for access to care, treatment, and other supportive services, instead of arrest and jail.
- **Provides training for law enforcement** regarding substance use disorders and how to connect people to services.
- **Assesses workforce conditions for the behavioral health services sector** with an aim toward improving service provisions and outcomes.
- **Creates better, evidence-based responses** including referrals to community-based care for public order issues stemming from substance use, to increase the safety and health of all of our communities.
- **Provides funding and resources** for increased treatment and recovery support services, including new revenue, leveraging existing health insurance benefits and grants.

Washington lawmakers can help community members access lifesaving and life-changing recovery services in rural and urban areas, while increasing community safety and health, by passing this legislation. The time for this smart, just and effective policy is now.

