

Our Daily Bread Advocacy Project: Spread the Tests, It's for the Best! Increasing Access to Fentanyl Test Strips Throughout Cincinnati

Our learning community is targeting access to healthcare as our chosen social determinant. For our project last year, we focused on the increased use of xylazine within the Over the Rhine community, as our community partner, Our Daily Bread, noticed an increase in patrons coming in with xylazine wounds. Through our project last year, we sought to increase awareness about xylazine wound care and resources patrons can use to take care of their wounds.

Our updated focus is on increasing access to fentanyl test strips in public areas around Cincinnati, such as public libraries and bus stops. Providing these resources can raise awareness about the dangers of fentanyl, leading to more discussions about safer practices and reducing overall drug usage. Studies have even demonstrated that increasing access to fentanyl test strips in public areas decreases the prevalence of people continuing their drug use.¹ Our focus on fentanyl rather than xylazine test strips is due to research that found that xylazine is almost always found along with fentanyl; only 52 out of 1,382 drug samples in Ohio that tested positive for xylazine did not contain fentanyl.² Additionally, xylazine test strips are considered drug paraphernalia in the State of Ohio and are therefore illegal, so increasing access to fentanyl test strips is more practical.³

Although Governor Mike Dewine recently announced the distribution of one million fentanyl test strips to Ohioans free of charge, this policy is predicated upon ordering test strips to your home.⁴ Therefore, the homeless population that is affected by xylazine and fentanyl use, including some patrons of Our Daily Bread, may not be able to access these strips to test drugs. It is essential that fentanyl test strips be accessible for all individuals, regardless of housing status. Additionally, the State of Ohio's initiative for opioid education known as Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided With Naloxone) has distributed almost 300,000 naloxone units and installed free naloxone cabinets across college campuses and rest stops in Ohio.⁴ Similar to the issue of distributing fentanyl test strips to Ohioans' homes, these free naloxone cabinets are only accessible to individuals on university campuses or those who have access to transportation. As a result, many people within Cincinnati do not have access, further increasing their risk of adverse events due to opioids. We urge the Cincinnati City Council to make fentanyl test strips more accessible to all people through the installation of free fentanyl test strip cabinets in public places.

We propose that five fentanyl test strip distributing boxes be added to public spaces around Cincinnati that do not require a person to enter an establishment and ask for one. Our advocacy strategy involves placing these distribution boxes in areas of the city known to have high rates of fentanyl overdoses. These neighborhoods are East Price Hill, Westwood, Avondale, Roselawn, and the West End.⁶ We will collaborate with local health and harm reduction organizations to find the best locations within these Cincinnati neighborhoods. This includes our slogan, "Spread the Tests. It's for the Best!".

References

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