U.S. Endorses Harm Reduction

U.S. surgeon general shows support harm reduction efforts.

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It’s no longer a secret that America has an opioid addiction problem, notably among injection drug users in rural counties. To help meet this challenge, the U.S. surgeon general has endorsed, for the first time, harm reduction efforts.

“Strategies include outreach and education programs, needle/syringe exchange programs, overdose prevention education and access to naloxone to reverse potentially lethal opioid overdose,” states a report titled Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General’s Report on Alcohol, Drugs and Health.

“These strategies are designed to reduce substance misuse and its negative consequences for the users and those around them,” continues the report. “They also seek to help individuals engage in treatment to reduce, manage and stop their substance abuse when appropriate.”

Harm reduction efforts—particularly syringe services—are vital not only to treat addiction but also to prevent the spread of illnesses such as HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Another benefit, says Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, is that harm reduction helps break down the stigma associated with addiction and drug use. In turn, more people are likely to seek help.

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