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Issue: Accessibility to Naloxone (Narcan) for Texas Bars and Restaurants

**Problem/Needs Statement:**

I am writing because, as the Executive Director of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission (TABC) in the Austin Regional Office, you have been bringing positive transformation to our community since 2005. Let us work together to make it a policy requirement for public establishments such as bars and restaurants always to have Narcan kits available. These kits will include Narcan nasal spray and instructions for use.

Opioid overdose continues to be a significant public health problem in the United States. This problem needs a solution because it has contributed significantly to accidental deaths among those community members who use or misuse illicit and prescription opioids. The opioid overdose epidemic is a significant public health issue in Texas that requires critical response efforts at the state and local levels (Table 1).

Experts for public health have advocated for increased availability of Naloxone, often known by the nasal spray brand Narcan. This medication plays a vital role in preventing the rates of overdoses in Texas from rising. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 4,984 deaths in Texas were related to overdose in 2021. The CDC estimates that this year, the number of deaths due to overdose rose over 12% (2023).

Due to a staffing vacancy rate of 15.3% in Travis County's police department and emergency services, Safe Haven, a non-profit program that supports people with substance use disorders in the community, has proactively stepped in (AustinTx.gov). They have provided Narcan and training to staff at 13 restaurants in Austin, Texas. They aim to encourage bar staff to play a role in reducing the disturbing rise in overdose deaths (Koski, 2022). To make Narcan more widely available in bars and restaurants throughout Texas, additional assistance from TABC and state lawmakers will be necessary.

**Proposed Solution:**

In 2023, the life-saving medication Naloxone (Narcan) has become the solution to reverse opioid overdoses, including those caused by heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioids, prompting initiatives to expand accessibility in public settings (Krishna & Park, 2023). I am proposing this policy to improve survival rates in Texas. This goal would be achieved by providing bar and

restaurant employees access to Narcan and creating an interactive application to educate employees and business owners on identifying overdose signs and administering Narcan. The Department of Health and Human Services suggests that if you suspect an opioid overdose, it is essential to administer Narcan. The FDA has approved Narcan, and emergency medical personnel have used it for many years to reverse opioid overdoses and revive individuals with signs and symptoms of overdose (DHHS, 2016, p. 6).

In 2021, an analysis of overdose deaths in 4 states, published by Public Health Reports, identified core elements of overdose programs that were successful in helping increase successful overdose prevention and response (Table 2). These core elements were comprehensive state policies, strategic planning efforts, local engagement, data collection and dissemination, targeted training for professional audiences, treatment infrastructure, and harm reduction (Robinson et al., 2021). The importance of these elements can help our state increase the success of overdose prevention efforts, with a focus on providing Narcan access and distribution to bars and restaurants in Texas.

In 2022, a “first-of-its-kind” modeling study in Canada assessed the current projected effort of Narcan distribution across the USA and found that most states in the U.S. are not doing enough to get Narcan out to the people who need it. This model suggested that giving easy access to Narcan to community establishments saves more lives and offers better chances for Narcan to be in use when needed (Irvine et al., 2022). If someone uses Narcan when they see an overdose, the person will survive (Table 3). The Canadian assessment revealed that death rates declined by 95% due to high volumes of Narcan kit distributions when a witnessed overdose occurred.

I hope you will consider that recent reports have shown service industry workers stepping up to administer Narcan to save customers from overdosing (Krishna & Park, 2023). When Narcan became available over the counter in March 2022, the hospitality industry kept it behind the bar, and has since been used to avert deaths. The impact report from the Drug Overdose Prevention and Education Project (DOPE) revealed in their annual impact report that Narcan achieved an impressive 8,765 overdose reversals in San Francisco neighborhood bars and restaurants (Joy Website Admin, 2023). Those 8,765 lives were saved because Narcan was readily available to the service workers in the restaurant industry. We can envision this significant impact in one city, and it is not impossible to see that we can save countless more lives in Texas by adjusting our policy and making Narcan kits and training more widely accessible.

### **Challenges:**

The most challenging part of this policy is getting the resources for training and supplies in bars and restaurants. These establishments must make sure they can protect their customers from overdoses. Many bars and restaurants are still having a tough time because of the economic hardships brought on by the pandemic, and they might need the proper setup to follow this policy. Some owners might wonder if it is worth it to train their staff to use Narcan, but providing training is an investment in the development of employee skills. These skills make the customers feel cared for and contribute to a positive experience. It will also have positive effects on the reputation of the bar or restaurant.

It is essential to communicate openly about these challenges. We need to find common ground with concerns so that the policy can work to help with public health issues related to overdoses. People in the service industry are part of a growing community that has started taking responsibility to keep customers safe. Having Narcan in bars and restaurants in Texas can make a big difference; customers will see that these businesses care about them.

Furthermore, we can make a training program that is easy to use with technology. This program can be user-friendly for staff, and employees can learn how to respond when an overdose occurs. This way, we can balance what bars and restaurants need, customer safety, and save lives.

### **Fiscal, legal, environmental, and social implications of implementing the new policy:**

A new policy to make Narcan accessible to bars and restaurants can have implications requiring funds and resources for training, groundwork, and technology development. Opponents of the policy may argue that fiscal resources should address the root causes of substance use disorders, such as addiction treatment and prevention programs, rather than providing Narcan in public establishments. I am proposing that this policy is a collaboration with efforts to address the cause of overdosing, and having a budget that will cover costs related to Narcan access, training development, and administrative expenses will be sought through government grants and partnerships with local healthcare organizations such as The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA), Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), Texas Harm Reduction Alliance (THRA), and the Texas Opioid Training Committee. One idea for a source of funds we can research is the *Treatment, Education, and Community Help to Combat Addiction Act of 2018* (H.R., 2018, 5261), which is an annual grant resource designated to improve the training of people who treat substance use disorders (United States. Congress. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce author).

Legal requirements associated with creating new policies need to be followed carefully. Making this new policy for bars and restaurants to administer Narcan may make some employees worry about their legal responsibility if they do not have consent or if something needs to be fixed. We can work together to help this policy change the rules and talk to decision-makers about which rules need to be in place and how they should work to ensure everything goes the right way.

Environmental implications of this policy should also be considered, mainly if it affects changes in practices to reduce the bar or restaurant's environmental footprint or adapt to new sustainability standards. In the new environment where there is such an increase in overdose deaths, bars and restaurants will need to redirect with new training goals that involve compromise because change takes time, and time is running out for many people who are at risk for overdosing (United States. Congress. House. Committee on Energy and Commerce author).

Implementing a new policy for accessibility to Narcan in bars and restaurants can influence relationships with employees, customers, and sponsors. It may require changes in company culture, affecting employee morale or influencing public perception and customer loyalty, depending on the policy's nature and how well it aligns with societal values and expectations. Socially, there can be shame associated with substance use disorders and overdose. Some bars

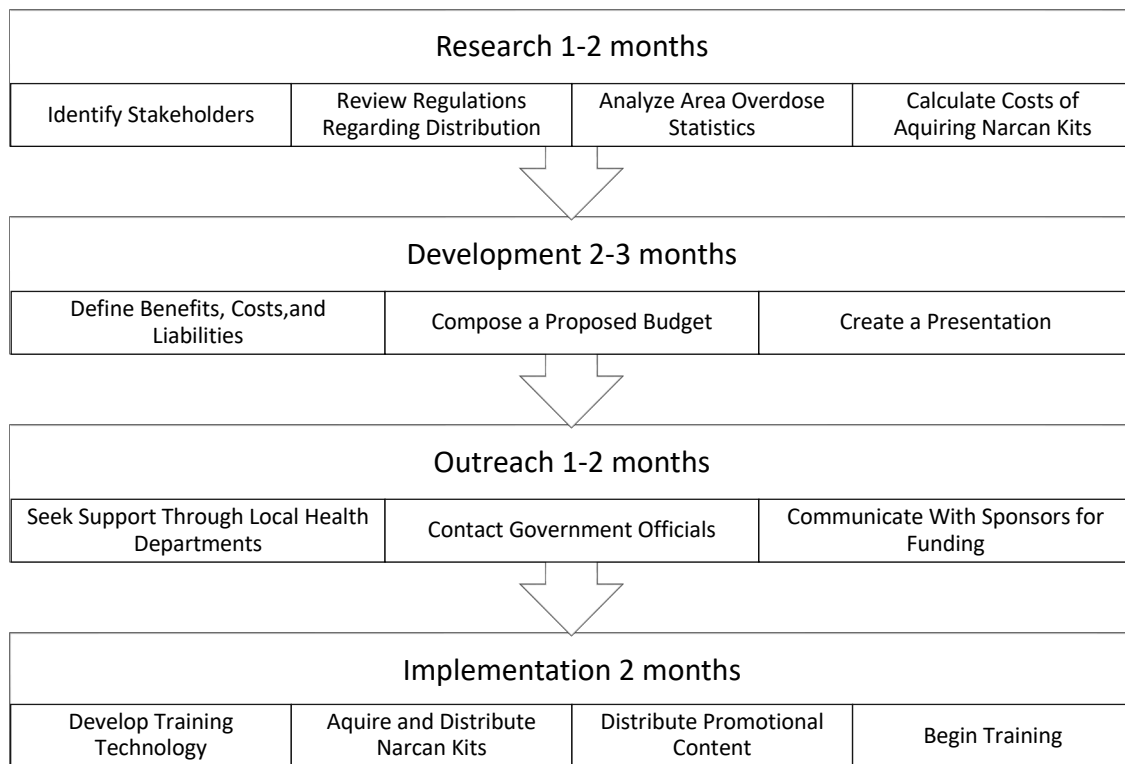
and restaurants may resist distributing Narcan due to misconceptions about addiction, concerns about attracting drug use, or fear of negative public perception.

“Disruptive innovation” is a type of change that comes from the business world but can be interesting when we want to make significant and radical societal changes (Christensen et al., 2006). We can use this idea to mend the current situation of rising deaths due to overdoses. We are already on a path of change; we need to expand accessibility to all bars and restaurants in Texas. We can also use technology to make it easier and cheaper to make these changes.

**Proposed Timeline for Implementation:**

I want to set up a meeting with you to discuss these research methods, which include monitoring the effectiveness of reducing overdose deaths in Texas by having this policy in effect. Adjusting the policy based on the data collected from the analysis, we campaign to inform the public about the availability of Narcan in bars and restaurants once we can begin the distribution to businesses. We can also revise a detailed plan together to develop guidelines for implementing the Narcan Accessibility policy to ensure that the policy is in effect to address the overdose crisis.

The chart below is a proposed timeline for implementing our new policy to make Narcan more accessible to bar and restaurant employees in Texas. I look forward to discussing this with you in the future.



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Table 1 (CDC, 2023):

## 12 Month-ending Provisional Number and Percent Change of Drug Overdose Deaths

Based on data available for analysis on: August 6, 2023

Figure 1a. 12 Month-ending Provisional Counts of Drug Overdose Deaths: United States

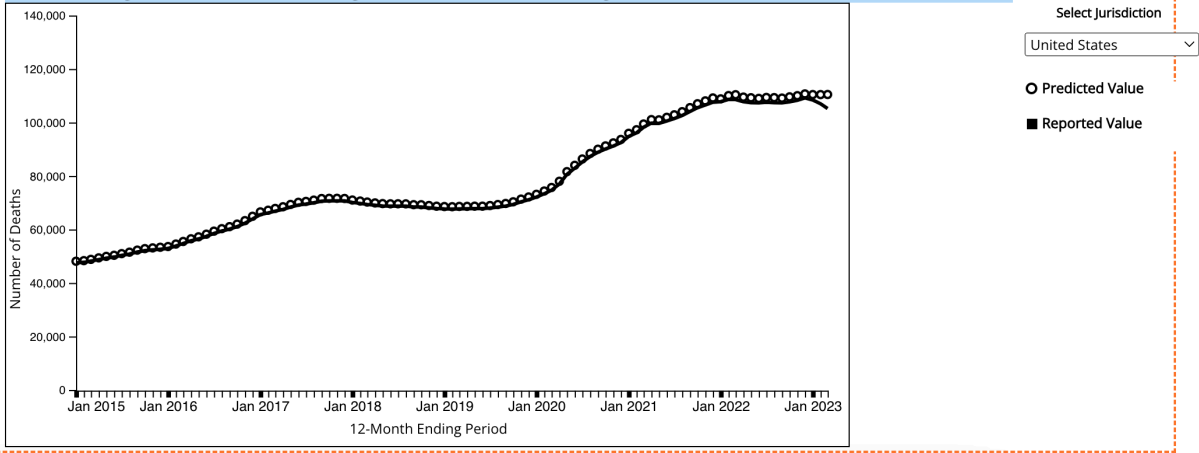


Figure 1b. Percent Change in Predicted 12 Month-ending Count of Drug Overdose Deaths, by Jurisdiction: March 2022 to March 2023

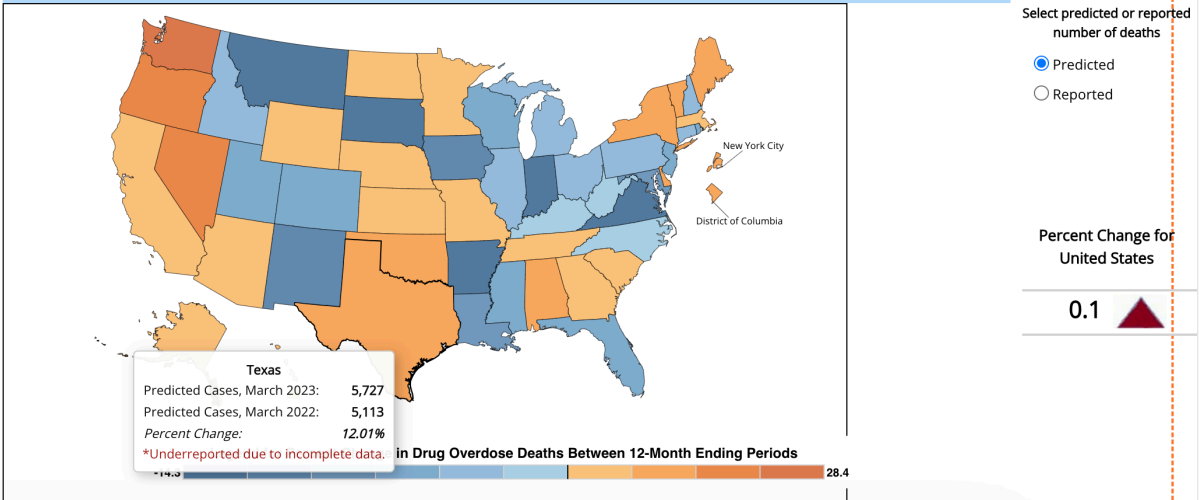


Table 2 (Robinson et al., 2021):

Table Core elements identified among 4 <sup>a</sup> states that experienced declines in rates of opioid-involved overdose death, 2016-2017 <sup>b</sup>		
Core element	Description	Examples
Comprehensive state policies	Policies that support overdose prevention and response efforts implemented at the state level	Good Samaritan laws, mandates for prescription drug monitoring program access and use, laws on access to naloxone and treatment
Strategic planning	Comprehensive planning and coordination of overdose and prevention efforts across various partners and/or levels	Commissions, workgroups, advisory committees
Local engagement	Collaboration between state organizations and local counterparts	Technical assistance, trainings, dissemination of interventions
Data access, capacity, and dissemination	Efforts to share data on trends and inform overdose prevention and response efforts	Data aggregation and linkage, web-based dashboards, quarterly reports
Targeted training for professional audiences	Audience-specific training materials and interventions tailored to overdose prevention and response efforts	Health care providers, pharmacists, law enforcement officers, first responders
Treatment infrastructure	Efforts to ensure adequate treatment supplies, staff members, and systems	Reduced barriers, increased capacity
Harm reduction	Efforts to prevent overdose and overdose-related harms among people who use drugs	Naloxone access and distribution, syringe services programs

<sup>a</sup>New Hampshire, New Mexico, Massachusetts, and Utah.

<sup>b</sup>Defined as programmatic activities occurring in all 4 program narratives.

Table 3 (Irvine, et al, 2022):

Subpopulations

