



Center for African American Recovery Development

RCO Toolkit

Resource 1.4

**Culture, Care & Choice:
Harm Reduction Strategies for
Black Recovery Spaces**



Culture, Care & Choice: Harm Reduction Strategies for Black Recovery Spaces

Liberation is strategic and inclusive.

For Black communities, recovery must include more than abstinence. True liberation means strategy, flexibility, and centering the right to heal in ways that honor our lives, not shame them. This guide introduces harm reduction and medication-assisted treatment (MAT) as valid, life-saving pathways within Black-led recovery spaces—and helps organizations take practical steps toward building inclusive systems of care.

Note: *This guide offers a brief introduction. For deeper tools and technical assistance, visit the [National Black Harm Reduction Network](#).*

Key Harm Reduction Strategies for RCOs

- Treat harm reduction and MAT as **primary strategies**, not fringe services.
 - Create **judgment-free spaces** where people who use drugs feel welcomed, not watched.
 - Provide tangible services like **Narcan distribution, safe use kits**, and **overdose prevention** education.
 - **Train peer workers** in trauma-informed harm reduction support.
 - Partner with **Black-led orgs** in the harm reduction space to co-design services.
 - Integrate ancestral and spiritual healing practices alongside clinical models.
 - Offer **multiple on-ramps** to healing—abstinence, moderation, faith-based, and MAT—all equal, all valid.
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Reflection Questions for RCO Leaders

- What is the language your team uses to describe harm reduction or MAT?
- How are people who use drugs involved in your programming or planning?
- Does your team have lived experience in multiple recovery paths?
- Have you made space for Afro-Indigenous, spiritual, or body-based healing traditions?
- Who are your harm reduction partners—and are they centered or sidelined?

- How does your org respond to community stigma about MAT or syringe services?
- Do your metrics reward abstinence only—or reflect broader healing goals and alternate pathways?

Sidebar: Myths vs. Facts About Harm Reduction

Common Myth

What's True

Harm reduction enables drug use

It reduces overdose, supports health, and creates safer conditions for healing.

MAT is “trading one drug for another”

MAT is medically validated and reduces relapse and overdose risk.

Abstinence is the only true recovery

There are many paths to recovery, including moderation and managed use.

Black communities don't believe in harm reduction

Black harm reductionists have led this work for decades—from street teams to clinics.

You can't offer harm reduction in faith-based settings

Many churches now distribute Narcan, host healing circles, and partner with MAT providers.

Turn principles into action and build culturally grounded recovery infrastructure.

Contact www.theCAARD.org for support