



**Governor Dan McKee's Overdose Task Force**  
***Summary Findings from the***  
***2025 Annual Recommendations Survey***



# Summary Findings from the Governor’s Overdose Task Force Annual Recommendations Survey

*May 2025*

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# Summary Findings from the Governor's Overdose Task Force Annual Recommendations Survey

May 2025

## Background

In March 2025, the [Governor's Overdose Task Force](#) sent out an Annual Recommendations Survey statewide stakeholders to gather feedback about its [core strategic plan](#) and priorities. The survey was developed by the [Prevent Overdose RI Team](#) from the [People, Place & Health Collective at Brown University School of Public Health](#).

In the survey, respondents could choose which Task Force work groups they were most involved in and ranked which strategies they thought were most important. The survey also asked open-ended questions about the Task Force's emerging issues and future challenges. Key priorities and common themes were identified from all open-ended responses. A total of 149 people completed the survey, from March 12, 2025 and April 1, 2025.

The Annual Recommendations Survey findings will be shared at the May 2025 Overdose Task Force Community Conversation. Task Force participants will have an opportunity to dialog about the findings and give additional feedback. As a final step in this community feedback process, the recommendations will be collated and presented to the [Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee](#) for consideration and prioritization.

## Emerging Response to the Changing Epidemic

### Key themes from open-ended questions:

- **Drug Supply Monitoring:** Keeping up with changes in drug supply, including novel adulterants and synthetic drugs.
- **Naloxone Accessibility:** Ensuring the availability and proper use of naloxone.
- **Communication and Education:** Providing risk communication materials and educating the public about emerging substances.
- **Legal and Policy Challenges:** Navigating increased legal scrutiny and potential changes in funding due to Federal executive orders.

## Emerging Response to the Changing Epidemic (continued)

**Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Staying on top of drug supply additives. Maintaining ease and availability of naloxone, expanding vending machines with associated supplies."*
- *"Our ability to keep up with/respond to changes in the drug supply, continuing to find innovative ways to reach individuals in private locations to prevent overdose"*
- *"Research chemicals/synthetic drugs, the volume and variety of substances is significant, but providers and doctors are not well educated on them overall or even aware of the trends"*
- *"Greater risk communication materials for people who use stimulants and greater attention to novel adulterants in the drug supply, including the funding of technologies to monitor the drug supply to inform harm reduction efforts"*
- *"Concerned about the emergence of new non-opioid sedatives (in addition to xylazine) showing up in illicit drug supplies."*

**Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Continuing to expand the availability of publicly accessible naloxone."*
- *"Tracking of non-opioid overdoses in Rhode Island."*
- *"Increased legal scrutiny on harm reduction practices."*
- *"Potential changes in funding due to Executive Orders."*

## Social Determinants of Health: Strengthening Families

**Key themes from open-ended questions:**

- **Perinatal Support:** Enhancing support for pregnant and parenting individuals, including peer recovery specialists.
- **Family-Centered Care:** Focusing on the long-term impact of substance use on families and children.
- **Education and Engagement:** Engaging families in recovery to support child development and healthy pregnancies.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Improving measurement and accountability in family support services.

## Social Determinants of Health: Strengthening Families (continued)

**Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Low barrier treatment for pregnant people."*
- *"Increase measurement and accountability to target DCYF role in SEN (substance-exposed newborn) diversion from DCYF and transparency on key metrics for parents and babies."*
- *"Revitalize the perinatal peer recovery specialist workforce, perinatal family support, improving the health of pregnant people living on the street (street medicine), reproductive health resources for street outreach teams."*
- *"I would rather SEN be rebranded as a group relating to supporting those who are "pregnant and parenting." The newborn phase itself is so short - it's the pregnancy, and the child's life that are going to be impacted by substance use, well beyond the infant stage."*
- *"Putting the baby in mind and recognizing their experience."*
- *"Supporting mom in recovery caring for SEN babies."*
- *"Reducing stigma and increasing access to recovery support that allows parents and babies to remain together."*
- *"Services for the baby and family from an infant mental health perspective."*

**Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Engaging pregnant patients with OUD/SUD (opioid use disorder/substance use disorder) in the prenatal period in order to engage them in support services that will help them have a healthy pregnancy and a positive birthing experience."*
- *"Engaging effectively with families in recovery in order to educate them/support them in nurturing their child's development."*
- *"Supporting the infant through the first years."*

## Social Determinants of Health: Housing, Employment, and Basic Needs

**Key themes from open-ended questions:**

- **Affordable Housing:** Addressing the lack of affordable housing and homelessness.
- **Resource Allocation:** Managing resource scarcity and the impact of layoffs.
- **Comprehensive Support:** Providing holistic support that includes housing, employment, and basic needs.

## Social Determinants of Health: Housing, Employment, and Basic Needs (continued)

**Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Availability of LICSW's (licensed independent clinical social workers) or LCSW's (licensed clinical social workers) that accept insurance."*
- *"Lack of affordable housing."*
- *"Finding appropriate living arrangements and building recovery capital."*
- *"Homelessness."*
- *"Resource scarcity, impact of layoffs, increased workload without increase in staff."*
- *"Address lack of housing, support a whole of government approach to address this critical SDOH (social determinants of health) and HRSN (health-related social needs)."*
- *"Housing, reentry, healthcare. Community outreach for folks who identify with being BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Other People of Color)."*
- *"Rising cost of living."*
- *"Polysubstance use and housing."*
- *"I believe the topics most important for our organization are related to housing, homeless, and overdose in our community."*

**Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Connecting supportive resources for people with MH (mental health) and SUD (substance use disorder). Housing is a big issue."*
- *"The seemingly impossible issue of housing shortages and increasing numbers of unhoused people."*
- *"Political issues with local and state municipalities evicting encampments and breaking trust with unhoused folks and their care teams."*
- *"Stable housing and job opportunities are crucial for sustained recovery, yet access remains limited."*

## Prevention

**The highest-ranked strategy identified by survey respondents:**

**Core Strategy 1:** Implement evidence-based primary prevention in schools, professional settings, and high-risk communities.

## Prevention (continued)

### Key themes from open-ended questions:

- **Youth Education:** Raising awareness about substance use among youth and its long-term risks.
- **Mental Health Awareness:** Promoting awareness of complementary and alternative treatments for anxiety.
- **Community Engagement:** Using innovative methods like drama therapy to support prevention education

### Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Tobacco/nicotine prevention and cessation."*
- *"Public education for all ages."*
- *"Youth substance use - lack of resources for treatment for youth addicted to nicotine. Youth low perception of harm re: cannabis. Rise in cannabis use among middle school students. The need to raise awareness with caregivers (parents) and connect early substance use among youth (and early learning about substances and coping) to risk of overdose as adult."*
- *"Supporting the peer recovery specialists' and first responders' mental health through drama therapy and workplace development. 2nd Act also uses theatre through plays and workshops to support prevention education for all ages and stages of life in community settings."*

### Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Creating awareness."*
- *"Political pressure/stigma."*
- *"Funding for drug take backs, incentives for people to attend prevention programming, sustained support for regional and local coalitions."*

## Harm Reduction and Rescue

### The highest-ranked strategy identified by survey respondents:

**Core Strategy 1:** Sustain naloxone accessibility via a statewide plan and evaluate impact.

### Key themes from open-ended questions:

- **Harm Reduction Education:** Educating families and communities about harm reduction strategies.

## Harm Reduction and Rescue (continued)

- **Policy Advocacy:** Advocating for the decriminalization of harm reduction materials and better legislative support.
- **Service Accessibility:** Ensuring multiple access points for harm reduction services and supplies.

**Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Public access to naloxone use and proper training."*
- *"Maintaining multiple access points for harm reduction services, sustained funds for harm reduction supplies and staffing."*
- *"More organization and advocacy with legislators to decriminalize 'drug paraphernalia' (pipes, drug checking technologies) and other harm reduction materials."*
- *"Providing harm reduction education to families and support people of those that use or are in recovery. Work toward new and innovative strategies to distribute Narcan."*
- *"Community drug checking--the drug supply is completely toxic, and we need a better handle on this than anything we have currently."*
- *"Protecting harm reduction and drug user health (i.e. HIV prevention) for the next four years. Support and expand the peer workforce, improve workforce conditions (pay, benefits, infrastructural supports, workforce development, and opportunities to grow, etc.)."*
- *"Future of harm reduction, both nationally and locally."*
- *"Our ability to keep up with/respond to changes in the drug supply; continuing to find innovative ways to reach individuals in private locations to prevent overdose."*

**Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"**

**What people said:**

- *"Anonymous distribution of Narcan, public education."*
- *"Staff burnout, increased legal scrutiny on harm reduction practices."*
- *"Financial decline. Loss of peer recovery specialist, tobacco cessation specialist, MAT (medication assisted treatment) members, funding for harm reduction materials."*

## Treatment

**The highest-ranked strategy identified by survey respondents:**

**Core Strategy 1:** Increase capacity and reduce barriers to ensure treatment on demand.



## Treatment (continued)

### Key themes from open-ended questions:

- **Equitable Access:** Expanding access to treatment for various substances, including stimulants and opioids.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Providing trauma-informed behavioral healthcare services.
- **Innovative Treatment Strategies:** Developing new tools and strategies to improve treatment outcomes.

### Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Inpatient MOUD (medications for opioid use disorder) option in pregnancy."*
- *"Low barrier treatment for pregnant people."*
- *"Awareness of complementary and alternative treatment for pre-clinical anxiety."*
- *"Treatment for stimulants and xylazine."*
- *"The availability and access to stimulant use treatment."*
- *"Trauma-informed behavioral healthcare services to focus on adverse childhood experiences."*
- *"Address the rise in stimulant use across all pillars; expand treatment overall but especially equitable access to treatment."*
- *"Increase perinatal peer workforce, inpatient MOUD, universal screening."*
- *"Need for a tool to demonstrate how treatment is improving outcomes - there is a continued need for such a tool."*
- *"Polysubstance use issues."*
- *"Cannabis use in middle school-aged youth and widespread use of cannabis and now THC alcohol drinks."*
- *"Opiate misuse and pain management in older folks"*
- *"Cannabis legalization."*
- *"Cannabis education, supporting OUD (opioid use disorder) families as (they) transition home."*
- *"Potentially lethal consequences of unintended fentanyl (or other opioid analog) use. Polysubstance use. Substance use and mental health prevention for the unhoused."*
- *"With the acute nature of polysubstance addiction with co-existing disorders, we need to consider ways to incentivize treatment whenever the community comes in contact with someone in need; also, to retain in treatment, mitigating relapses and ensuring the quality of treatment by removing barriers to coordinated care and involving recovery capital."*

### Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"

#### What people said:

- *"PRS (Peer recovery specialists) and CHW (community health workers) reimbursement is too low. Fee for service model is inappropriate for this service."*

## Treatment (continued)

- *“Limited treatment space on demand, the worsening homeless crisis is creating more substance use and relapse.”*
- *“The challenge of shifting youth attitudes toward cannabis use.”*
- *“Potential cuts in funding, access to treatment for our people.”*

## Recovery

**The highest-ranked strategy identified by survey respondents:**

**Core Strategy 3:** Recruit, support, expand, and train peer recovery specialists (PRS)

**Key themes from open-ended questions:**

- **Supportive Housing:** Providing stable and recovery-focused living environments post-treatment.
- **Workforce Integration:** Connecting the recovery community with workforce opportunities.
- **Insurance and Parity:** Addressing insurance and parity issues to ensure equal access to recovery resources.

**Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"**

**What people said:**

- *“Contained support, services and safe, stable sober living after treatment.”*
- *“More drug rehab centers covered for more than three weeks and more recovery housing for low income or no income adults.”*
- *“Building community supports for recovery efforts.”*
- *“Recovery Advocacy.”*
- *“Recovery friendly workplaces.”*
- *“Addressing the opioid crisis, with intervention, prevention and recovery.”*
- *“How to connect the recovery community with workforce opportunities.”*
- *“Funding for recovery resources making detox, residential, IOP, and all other support services, etc. equally accessible and safe amongst patients without insurance, undocumented patients, and patients identifying as trans.”*
- *“Insurance and parity Issues – despite laws requiring equal coverage for mental health and addiction treatment, many patients still struggle with insurance denials and high costs.”*
- *“There is no such thing as safer drug use just because you have a box of Narcan with you for someone to shoot up your nose after you pass out. The data from DEA shows safer drug (use) is Russian roulette. Telling people this in Rhode Island and all over the US will save lives.”*

## Recovery (continued)

### Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Funding cuts and lack of services."*
- *"Funding challenges."*
- *"Funding for targeted information-sharing, support for diverse workforce that includes older adults in recovery."*
- *"Maintaining Medicaid coverage of adult dental services."*
- *"Many recovery organizations rely on federal or state grants, which can be unpredictable or insufficient to meet growing needs."*

## Racial Equity

### The highest-ranked strategy identified by survey respondents:

**Core Strategy:** Focus on disparities across all aspects of social determinants of health, including inclusive housing, stable employment, and basic needs.

#### Key themes from open-ended questions:

- **Addressing Stigma:** Overcoming stigma related to substance use in marginalized communities.
- **Equitable Services:** Ensuring equitable access to housing, healthcare, and recovery services for BIPOC communities.
- **Community Outreach:** Enhancing outreach efforts to marginalized populations.

### Question 1: "What emerging issues or topics (local, statewide, or nationally) are most important to you or your organization this year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Fatal overdoses among Black men who use crack cocaine."*
- *"Overcoming stigma, especially among Hispanic Rhode Islanders, Black Rhode Islanders, and older people."*
- *"Continuing the work with a focus on marginalized populations."*
- *"Housing, reentry, healthcare. Community outreach for folks who identify with being BIPOC."*
- *"Increasing access to and utilization of services by residents of color."*

## Racial Equity (continued)

### Question 2: "What challenges do you or your organization face over this coming year?"

#### What people said:

- *"Direct attack on equity and inclusivity on non-white community members, the LGBTQA+ community, women, and other marginalized groups through policies, funding decisions, and other decisions that are being made by the federal government."*
- *"Decrease in funding and risk of defunding for DEI initiatives."*
- *"I am unsure where the money for racial equity is going in the DOH budget."*
- *"Finding effective ways to reach communities of color where they are and where they feel comfortable accessing services."*

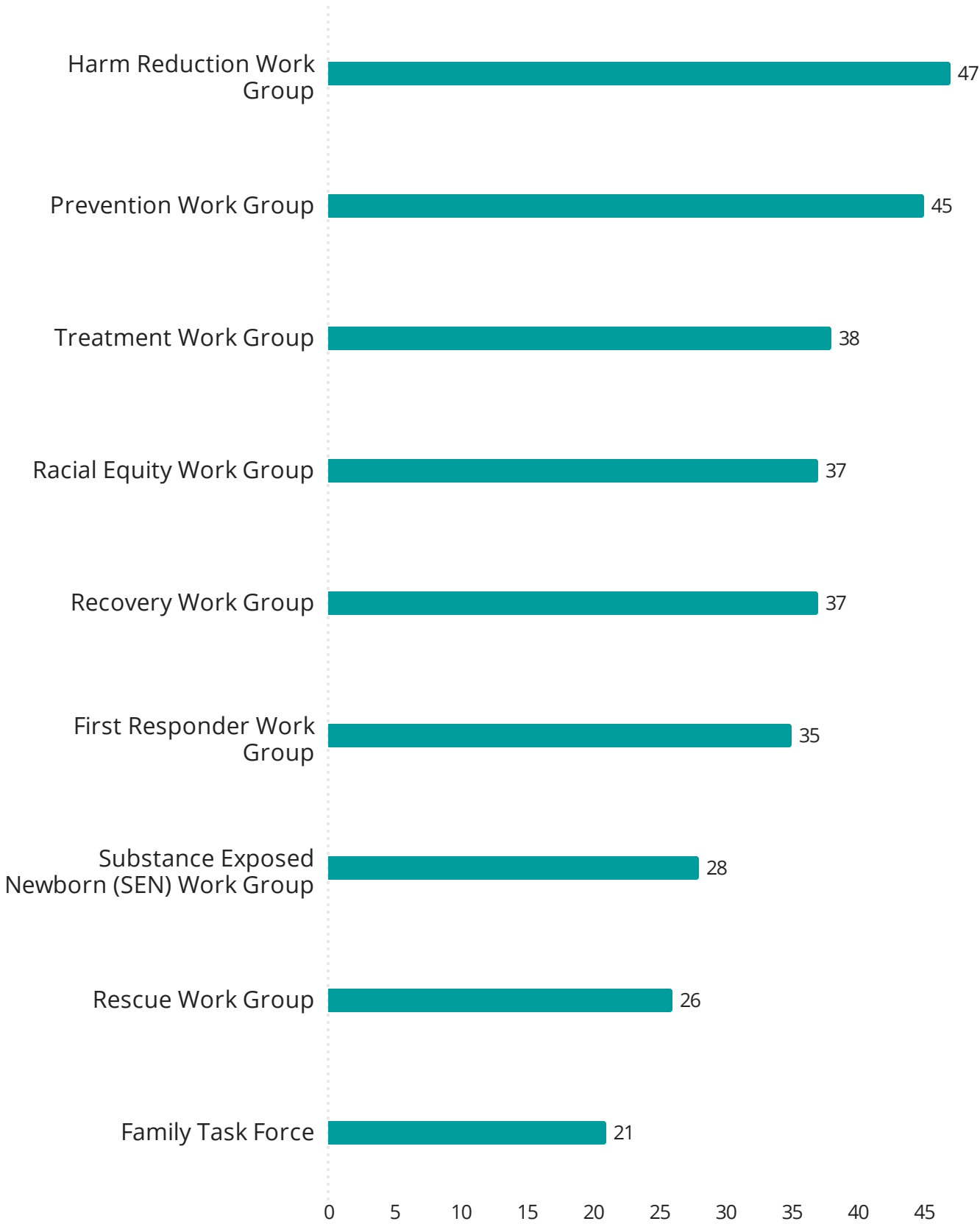


## **Appendix**

### ***Summary Findings from the 2025 Annual Recommendations Survey***

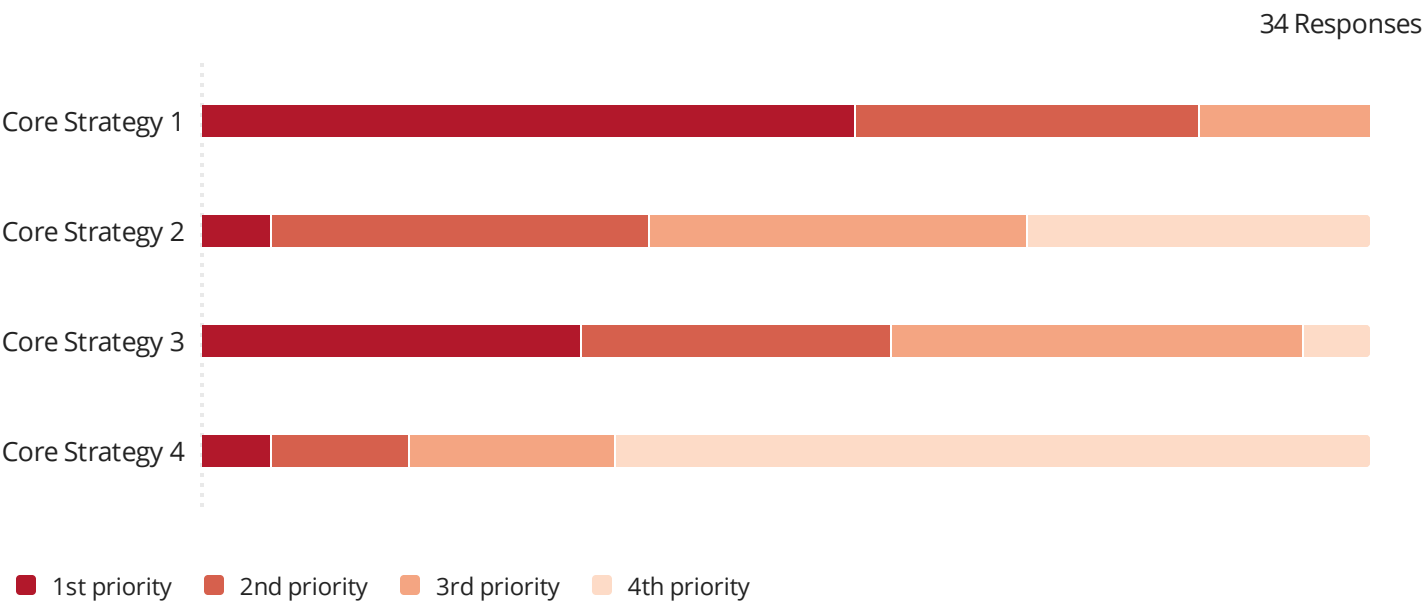
# What work groups are you most involved in?

149 Responses



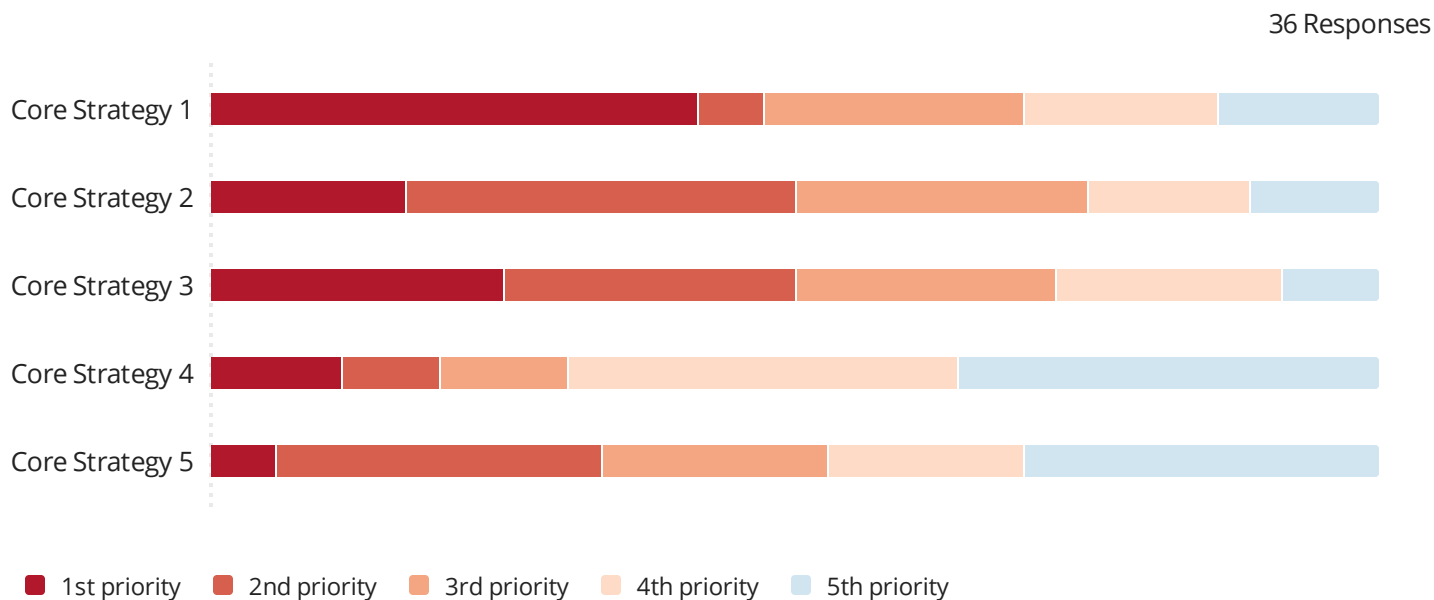
# Prevention Workgroup Responses

Strategy	34 Responses			
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority
Core Strategy 1: Implement evidence-based primary prevention in schools, professional settings, and high-risk communities.	55.9%	29.4%	14.7%	0.0%
Core Strategy 2: Incorporate prevention for workplace injuries, disability leaves, and rehabilitation services.	5.9%	32.4%	32.4%	29.4%
Core Strategy 3: Prioritize prevention activities that recognize race equity, eliminate structural racism and disparities.	32.4%	26.5%	35.3%	5.9%
Core Strategy 4: Prevent overprescribing and ensure appropriate prescribing and dispensing of opioids.	5.9%	11.8%	17.6%	64.7%



# Harm Reduction Workgroup Responses

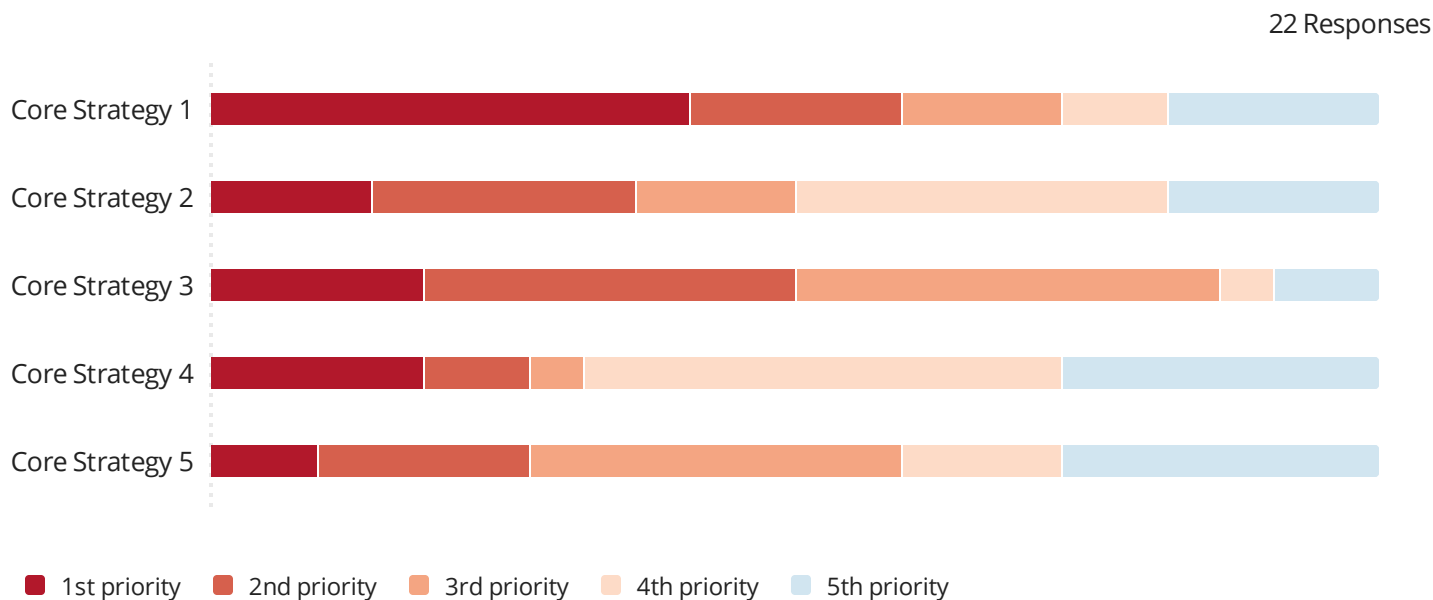
Strategy	36 Responses				
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	5
Core Strategy 1: Sustain naloxone accessibility via a statewide plan and evaluate impact.	42%	6%	22%	17%	14%
Core Strategy 2: Maximize access to harm reduction materials and resources.	17%	33%	25%	14%	11%
Core Strategy 3: Ensure harm reduction services are comprehensive and responsive to evolving needs of PWUD.	25%	25%	22%	19%	8%
Core Strategy 4: Improve alternate post-overdose engagement strategies.	11%	8%	11%	33%	36%
Core Strategy 5: Prioritize racially focused harm reduction outreach strategies, including undocumented people.	6%	28%	19%	17%	31%





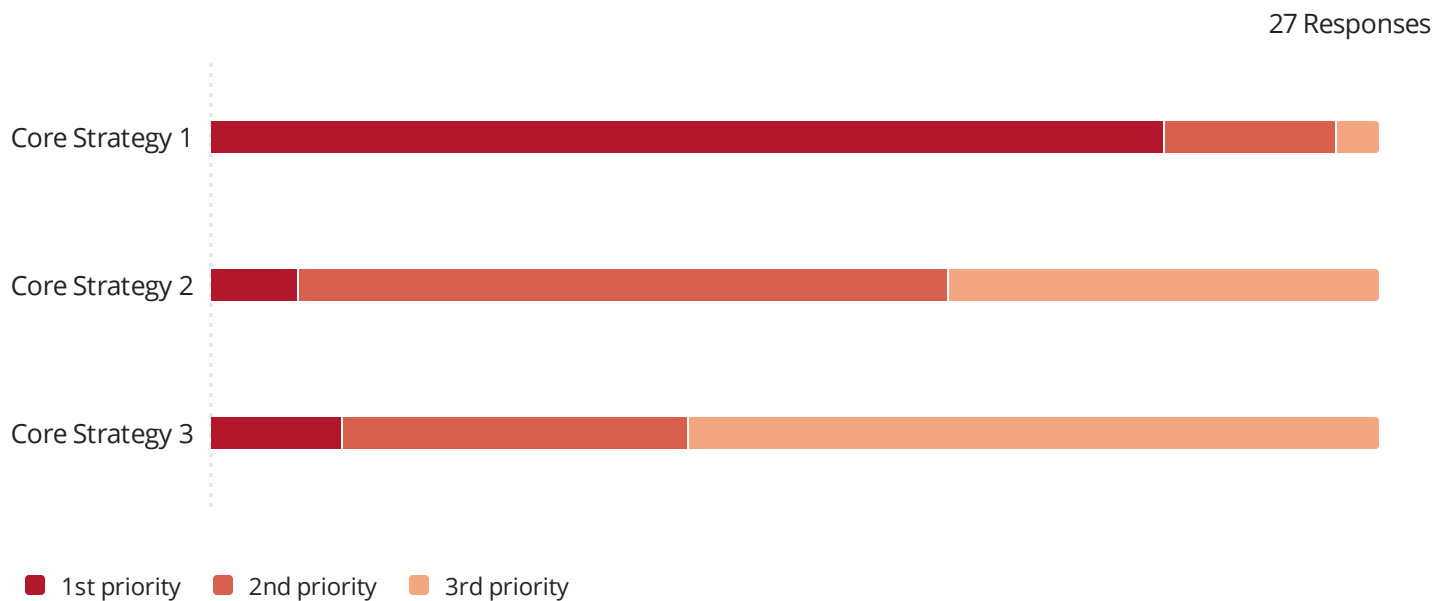
# Rescue Workgroup Responses

Strategy	22 Responses				
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	5
Core Strategy 1: Sustain naloxone accessibility via a statewide plan and evaluate impact.	41%	18%	14%	9%	18%
Core Strategy 2: Maximize access to harm reduction materials and resources.	14%	23%	14%	32%	18%
Core Strategy 3: Ensure harm reduction services are comprehensive and responsive to evolving needs of PWUD.	18%	32%	36%	5%	9%
Core Strategy 4: Improve alternate post-overdose engagement strategies.	18%	9%	5%	41%	27%
Core Strategy 5: Prioritize racially focused harm reduction outreach strategies, including undocumented people.	9%	18%	32%	14%	27%



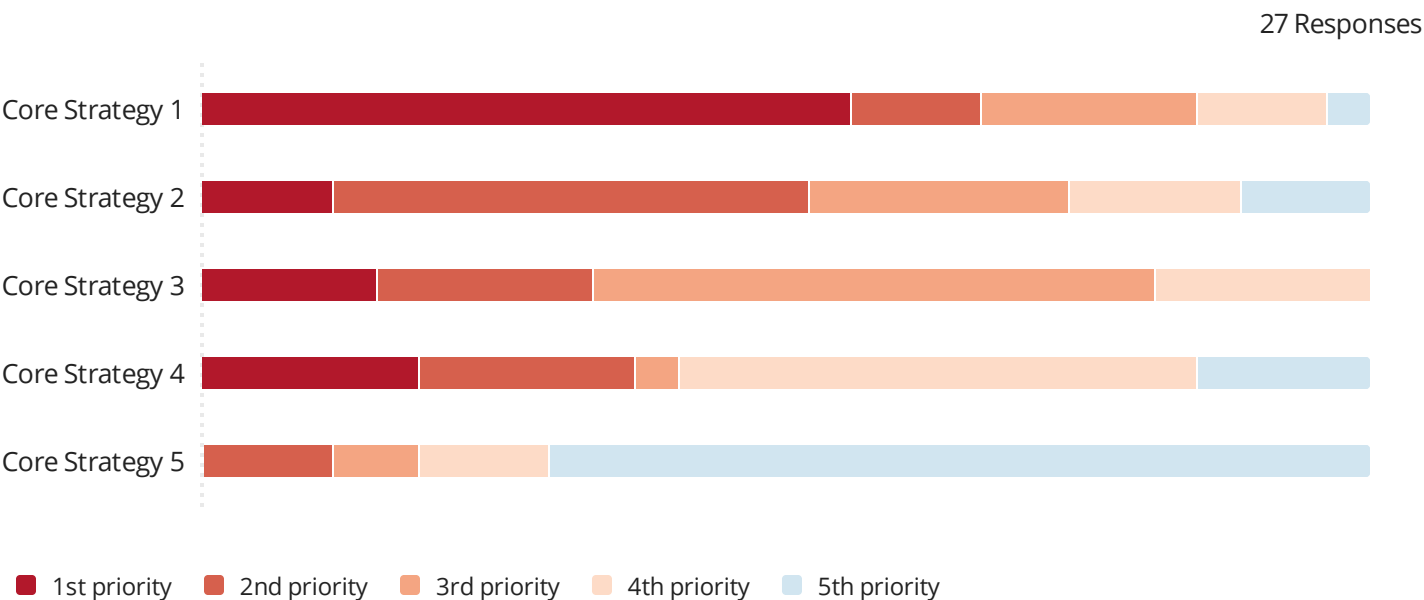
# Treatment Workgroup Responses

Strategy	27 Responses		
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority
Core Strategy 1: Increase capacity and reduce barriers to ensure treatment-on-demand.	81%	15%	4%
Core Strategy 2: Monitor and improve treatment program outcome assessments.	7%	56%	37%
Core Strategy 3: Improve partnerships among substance use and primary care providers.	11%	30%	59%



# First Responders Workgroup Responses

Strategy	27 Responses				
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	5
Core Strategy 1: Sustain naloxone accessibility via a statewide plan and evaluate impact.	56%	11%	19%	11%	4%
Core Strategy 2: Maximize access to harm reduction materials and resources.	11%	41%	22%	15%	11%
Core Strategy 3: Ensure harm reduction services are comprehensive and responsive to evolving needs of PWUD.	15%	19%	48%	19%	0%
Core Strategy 4: Improve alternate post-overdose engagement strategies.	19%	19%	4%	44%	15%
Core Strategy 5: Prioritize racially focused harm reduction outreach strategies, including undocumented people.	0%	11%	7%	11%	70%

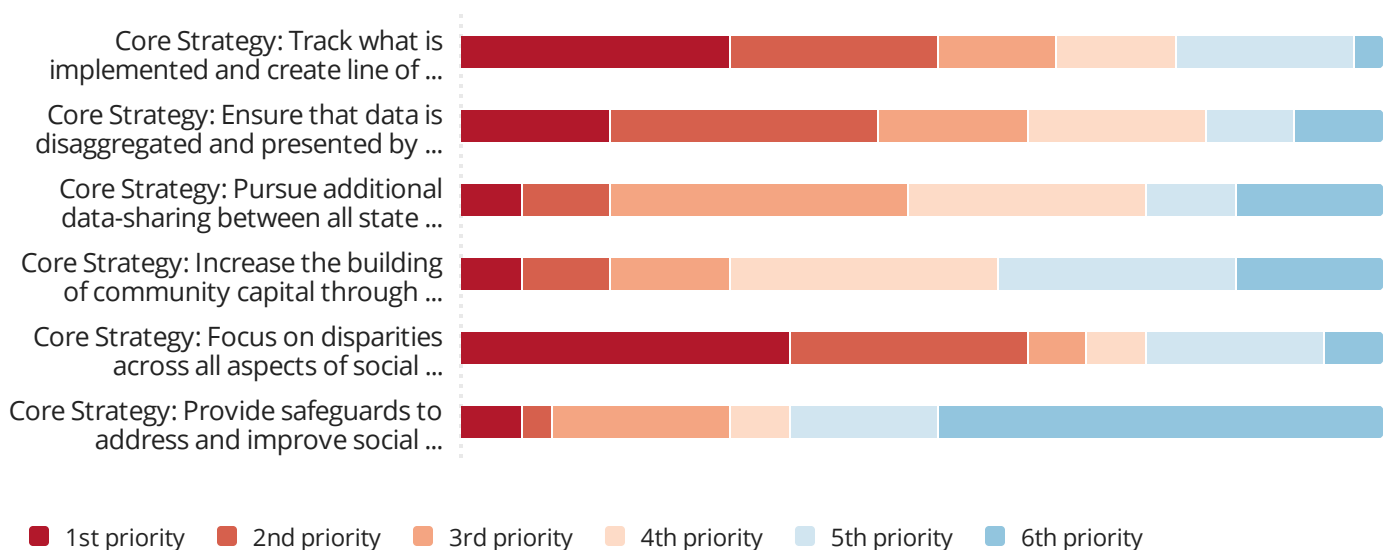


# Racial Equity Workgroup Responses

31 Responses

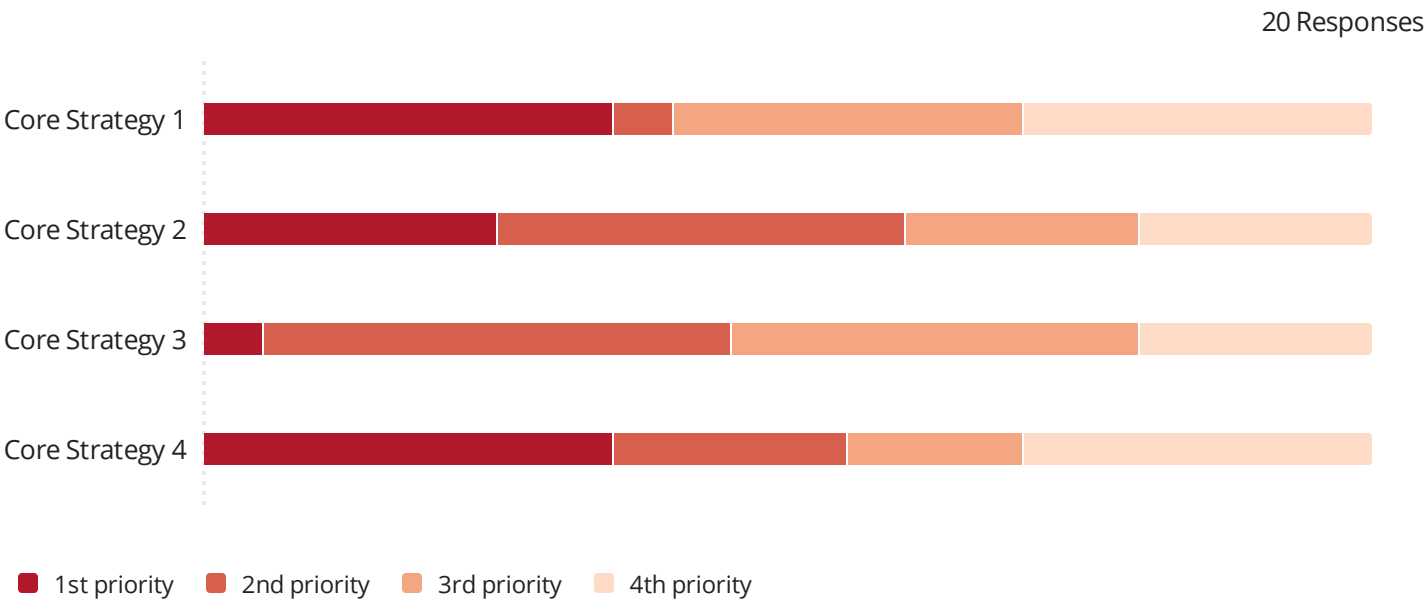
Strategy	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority	5	6
Core Strategy: Track what is implemented and create line of accountability for investments while strengthening the community's voice in the Governor's Overdose Task Force—specifically people who use drugs (PWUD).	29%	23%	13%	13%	19%	3%
Core Strategy: Ensure that data is disaggregated and presented by race/ethnicity.	16%	29%	16%	19%	10%	10%
Core Strategy: Pursue additional data-sharing between all state agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders to allow for more effective community outreach.	6%	10%	32%	26%	10%	16%
Core Strategy: Increase the building of community capital through education and messaging.	6%	10%	13%	29%	26%	16%
Core Strategy: Focus on disparities across all aspects of social determinants of health, including inclusive housing, stable employment, and basic needs.	35%	26%	6%	6%	19%	6%
Core Strategy: Provide safeguards to address and improve social connectedness—a key social determinant.	6%	3%	19%	6%	16%	48%

31 Responses



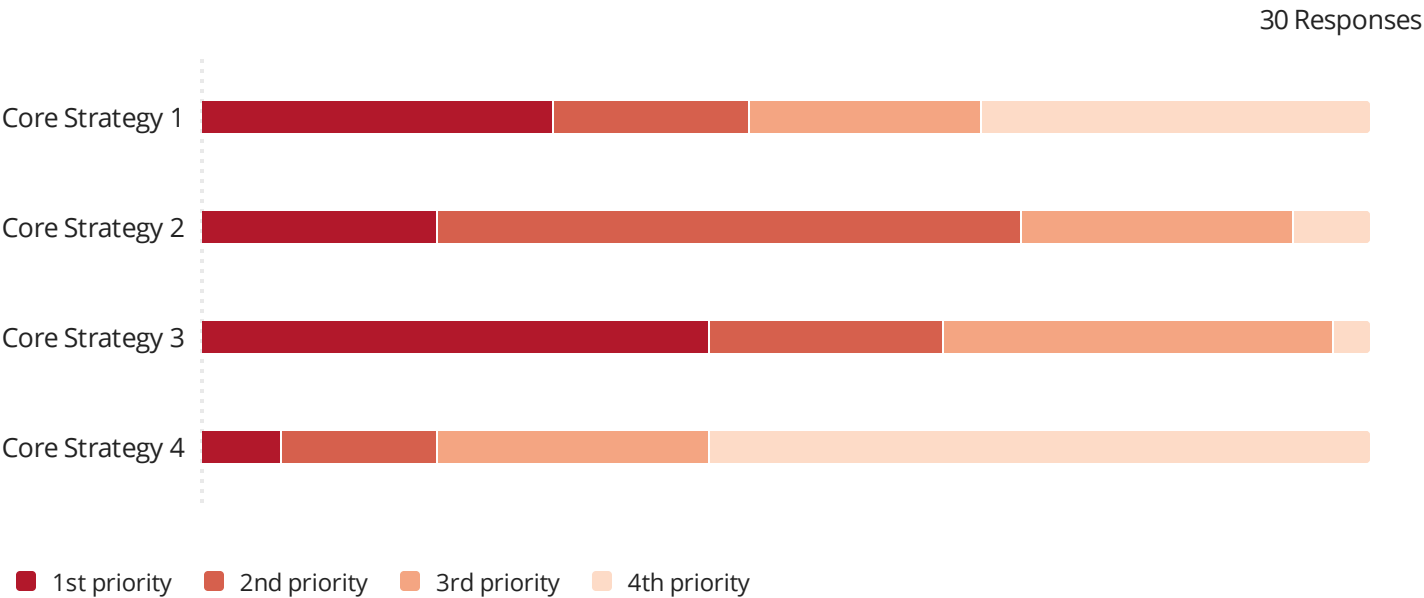
# Substance Exposed Newborns Workgroup Responses

Strategy	20 Responses			
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority
Core Strategy 1: Standardize recovery-focused data collection methods and success metrics.	35%	5%	30%	30%
Core Strategy 2: Build recovery capital across personal, family/social, community, and cultural environments.	25%	35%	20%	20%
Core Strategy 3: Recruit, support, expand, and train Peer Recovery Specialists (PRS).	5%	40%	35%	20%
Core Strategy 4: Support substance-exposed newborn (SEN) interventions and infrastructure.	35%	20%	15%	30%



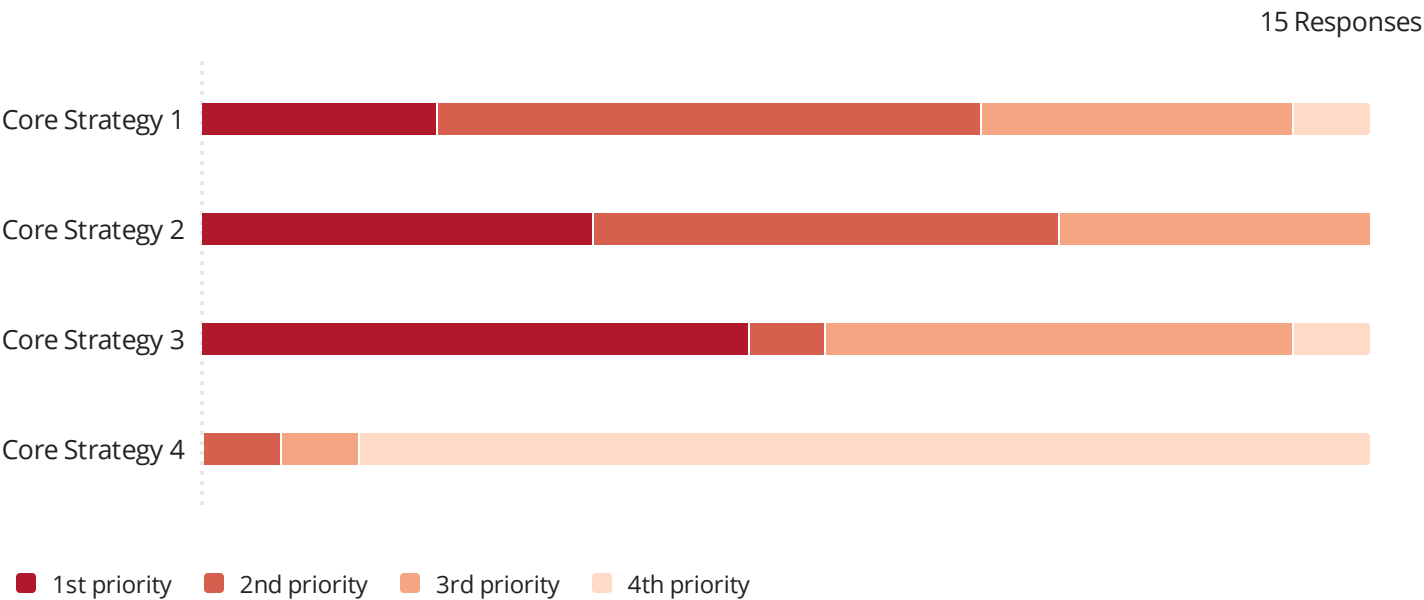
# Recovery Workgroup Responses

Strategy	30 Responses			
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority
Core Strategy 1: Standardize recovery-focused data collection methods and success metrics.	30%	17%	20%	33%
Core Strategy 2: Build recovery capital across personal, family/social, community, and cultural environments.	20%	50%	23%	7%
Core Strategy 3: Recruit, support, expand, and train Peer Recovery Specialists (PRS).	43%	20%	33%	3%
Core Strategy 4: Support substance-exposed newborn (SEN) interventions and infrastructure.	7%	13%	23%	57%

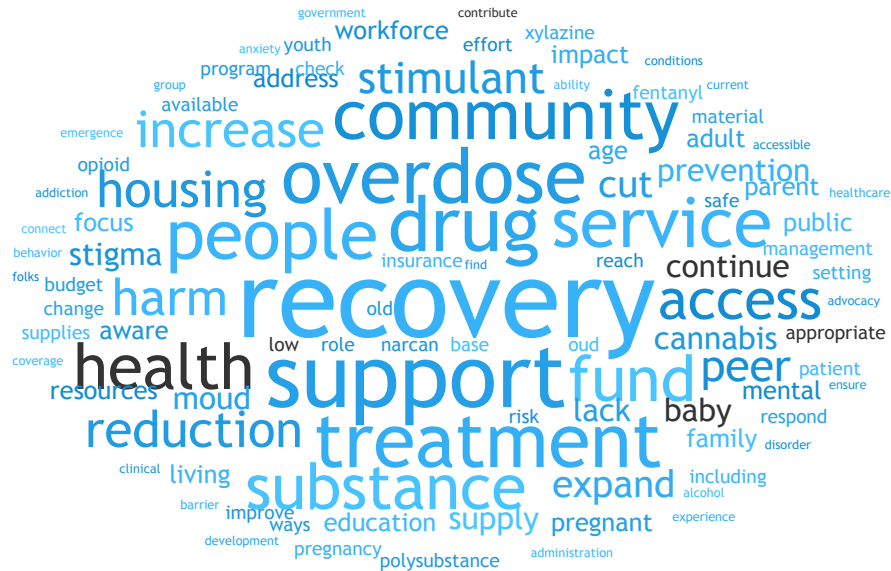


# Family Workgroup Responses

Strategy	15 Responses			
	1st priority	2nd priority	3rd priority	4th priority
Core Strategy 1: Standardize recovery-focused data collection methods and success metrics.	20%	47%	27%	7%
Core Strategy 2: Build recovery capital across personal, family/social, community, and cultural environments.	33%	40%	27%	0%
Core Strategy 3: Recruit, support, expand, and train Peer Recovery Specialists (PRS).	47%	7%	40%	7%
Core Strategy 4: Support substance-exposed newborn (SEN) interventions and infrastructure.	0%	7%	7%	87%



## 95 Responses



## 88 Responses

