



Governor Dan McKee's Overdose Task Force

December 10, 2025

Richard Leclerc; Director, Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

Jerome Larkin, MD; Director, Rhode Island Department of Health

Alex Gautieri, MSW; Task Force Community Co-Chair

Ana Novais, MA; Assistant Secretary, Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Cathy Schultz, MPH; Task Force Director, Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services

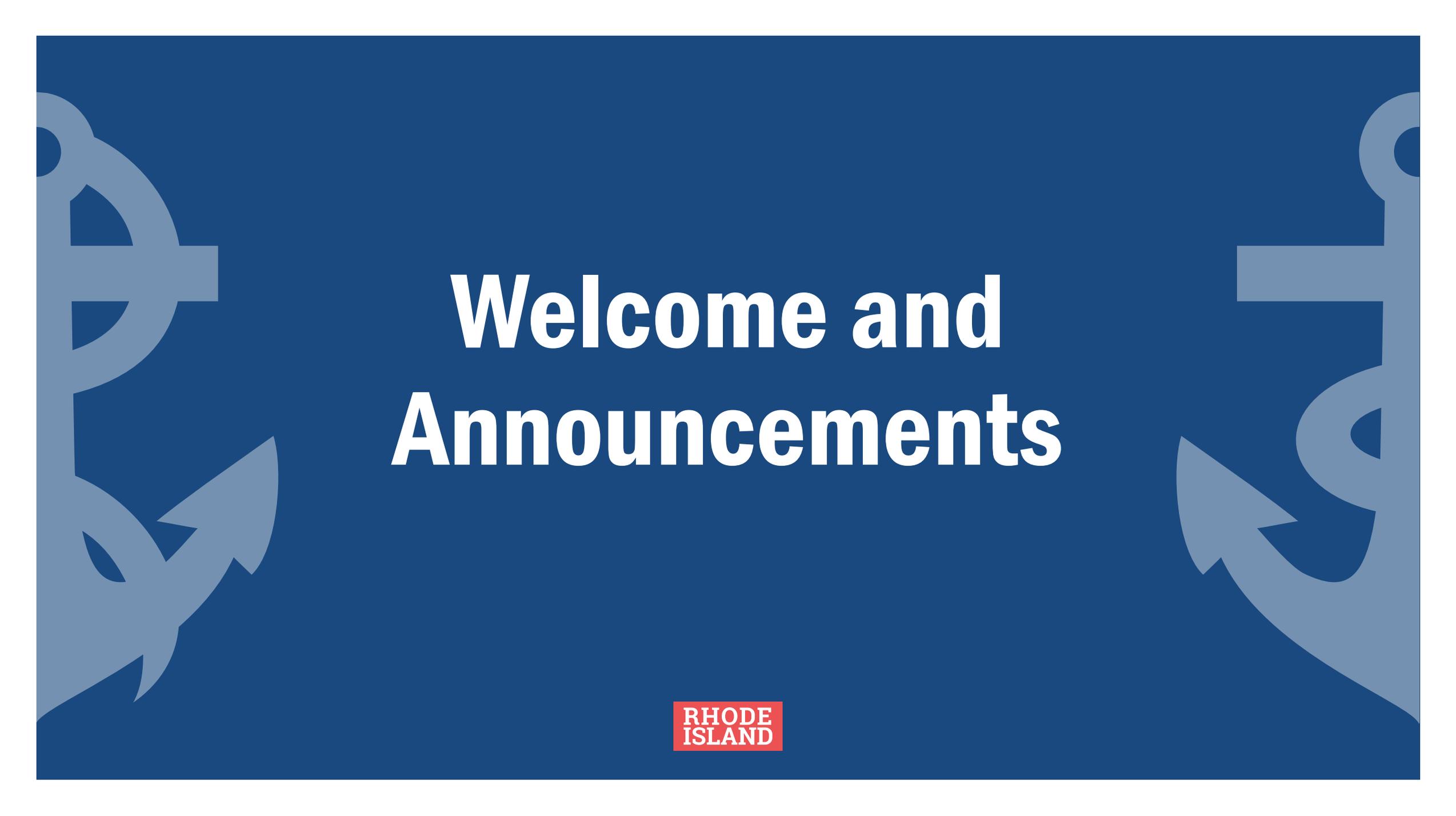
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10-Year Anniversary Commemoration



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Welcome and Announcements

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Community Advocacy in Action

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**Dedicated to Community and
the Power of Connection:
Jim Gillen and Bob Houghtaling**

Establishing the Overdose Task Force

- **August 4, 2015:** Governor Gina M. Raimondo issued [Executive Order 15-14](#) to establish a comprehensive Task Force and gave them a clear mission: *Save lives*.
- **November 2015:** Task Force Co-Chairs and Expert Advisors submitted a [strategic plan](#) to the Governor and laid out four complementary strategies (Prevention, Rescue, Treatment, and Recovery).



Photo credit: [The Providence Center](#)

Task Force Expert Advisors for the Strategic Plan



Brandon Marshall, PhD

Photo credit: Brown University School of Public Health



Elinore McCance-Katz, MD, PhD

Photo credit: Rhode Island BHDDH



Jonathan Goyer

Photo credit: RI News Today



Josiah Rich, MD, MPH

Photo credit: Brown University Health



Traci C. Green, PhD, MSc

Photo credit: Northeast Node



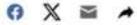
Jeffrey Bratberg, PharmD, FAPhA

Photo credit: University of Rhode Island



R.I. overdose deaths increased by 12% in 2016

Lynn Arditi larditi@providencejournal.com
Feb. 22, 2017, 5:00 p.m. ET



PROVIDENCE, R.I. --Rhode Island health officials are reporting a surge in accidental drug overdoses related to the powerful opioid fentanyl.

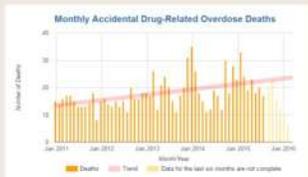
At least 326 people died of drug overdoses last year, of which 57 percent were fentanyl-related, according to data released Wednesday. In 2015, 47 percent of the deaths were fentanyl-related.

Overall, overdose deaths rose from 290 to 326, a 12 percent increase.

"The number of fentanyl-related deaths has just gone off the charts," U.S.



From 2011 to 2015, overdose deaths increased nearly 50 percent



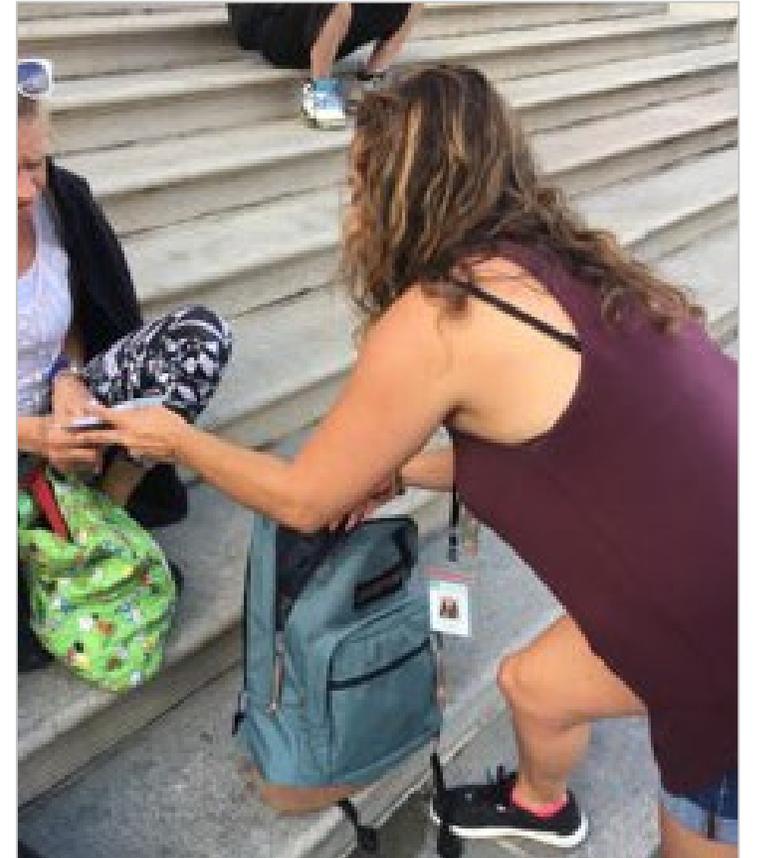
SOURCE: Rhode Island Department of Health

- In 2014, more than 240 Rhode Islanders lost their lives to overdose.
- Preliminary 2015 data shows as many as 257 overdose deaths.
- Through April 2016, Rhode Island has confirmed 46 overdose deaths.

2016 Highlights



Levels of Care for Rhode Island Emergency Departments and Hospitals for Treating Overdose and Opioid Use Disorder



2017 Highlights



2018 Highlights



2019 Highlights



2020 Highlights



WEBER + RENEW

YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR

Pawtucket



RIBBON CUTTING




YOUR APPROACH
MAKES A
DIFFERENCE

LANGUAGE IS PART OF OUR EVERYDAY REALITY.
HOW WE TALK TO AND
ABOUT PATIENTS IS IMPORTANT.



2021 Highlights



The New York Times

As Overdoses Soar, Rhode Island Embraces a Daring Addiction Strategy

It is the first state to legalize supervised drug consumption sites, which some addiction experts believe will help lower record overdose rates.

Share full article



Upcoming Events

In-person free Naloxone & Training. Dr. Jacobson will be there to help you become a Community First Responder and learn how to help save a life!

Thursday, February 17th, 2022

4:00PM-6:30PM

CVS on 1400 Hartford Ave Johnston

*If you are unable to make it, visit our website for online training and naloxone by mail requests.

CFRP www.uri.edu/cfrp
COMMUNITY FIRST RESPONDER PROGRAM



Cristina Ramsey, left, embracing Ashley Perry of Project Weber/Renew, days before Ms. Ramsey died from drug-related illnesses. Erin Schaff/The New York Times

2022 Highlights

Xylazine Found in Samples from the Local Rhode Island Drug Supply



testRI is a two-year study to find out what is in the drug supply in Rhode Island and how changes to the supply are impacting people who use drugs in our community. We are testing used equipment, like pipes and syringes, that are collected from the community or donated by individuals or local organizations. Samples are tested using advanced confirmatory toxicology testing (LC-QTOF-MS).

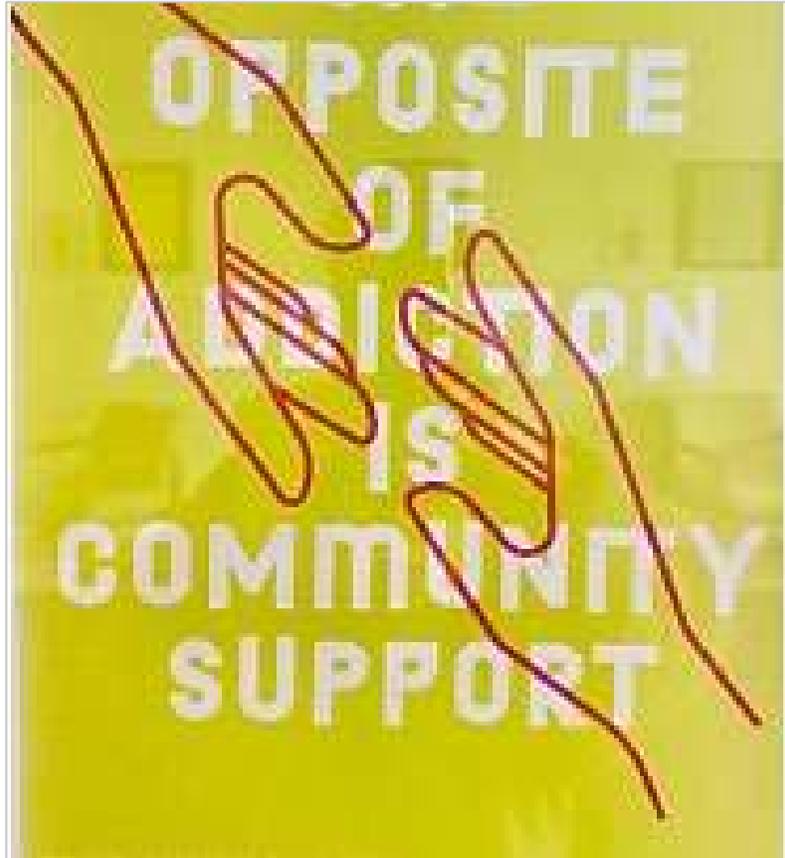
Data from all samples tested in the study can be found on <https://preventoverdoseri.org/local-drug-supply/>

*Samples we have collected and tested only represent a small part of the local drug supply in Rhode Island and may not represent the broader drug supply in the state. Samples are also not being tested in relation to overdose so outcomes from use, like overdose, are unknown.

Xylazine:

Background:
Recently xylazine was found in multiple drug samples in Rhode Island. In some places, it is referred to as "tranq dope."

Health Effects:
Xylazine can cause drowsiness, unresponsiveness, low blood pressure, slow heart rate, and decreased breathing.



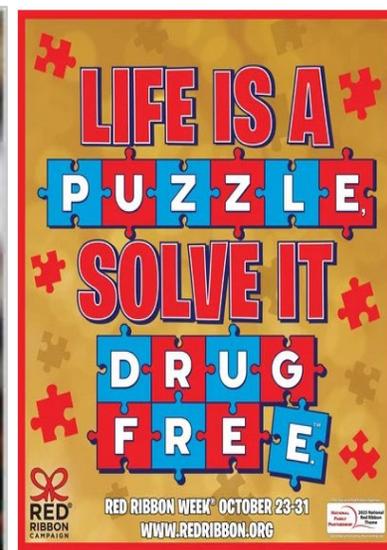
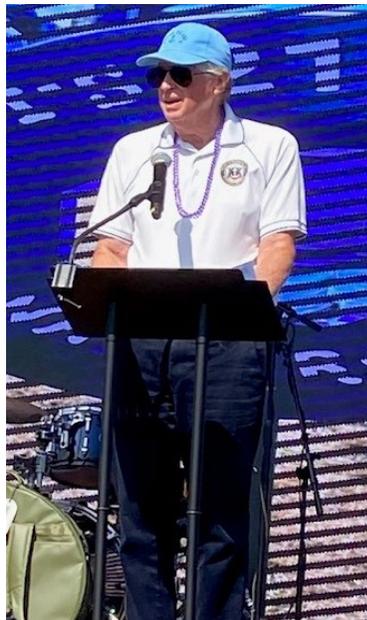
2023 Highlights

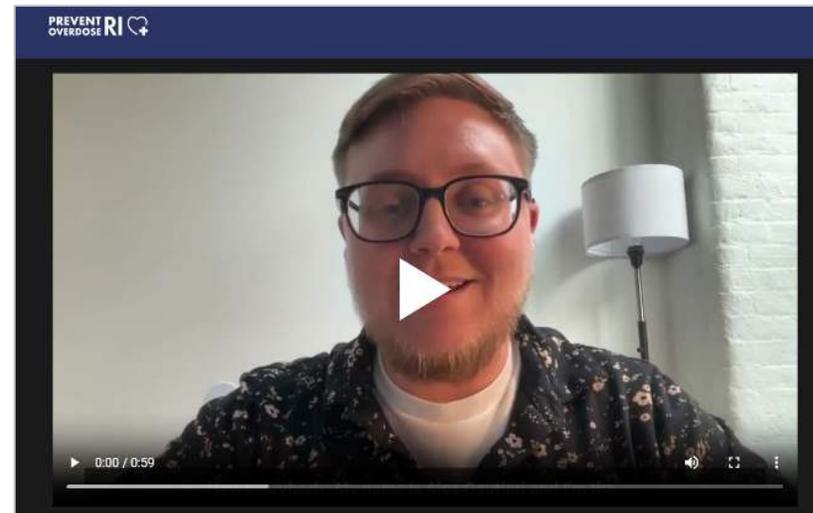
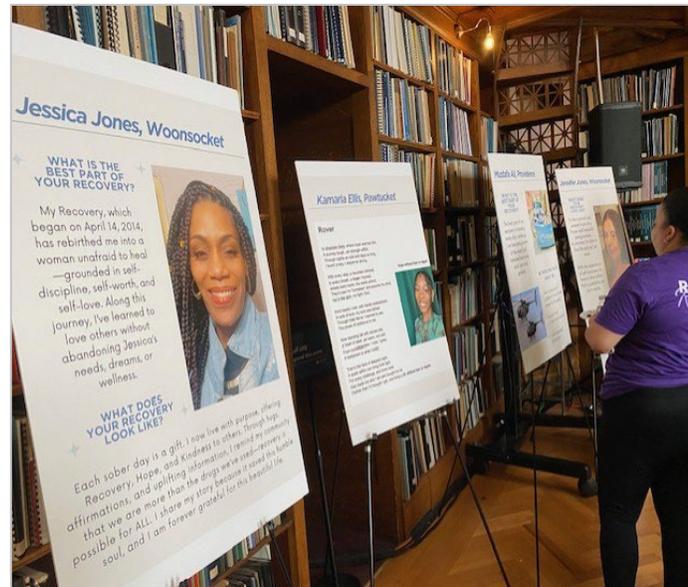


2024 Highlights

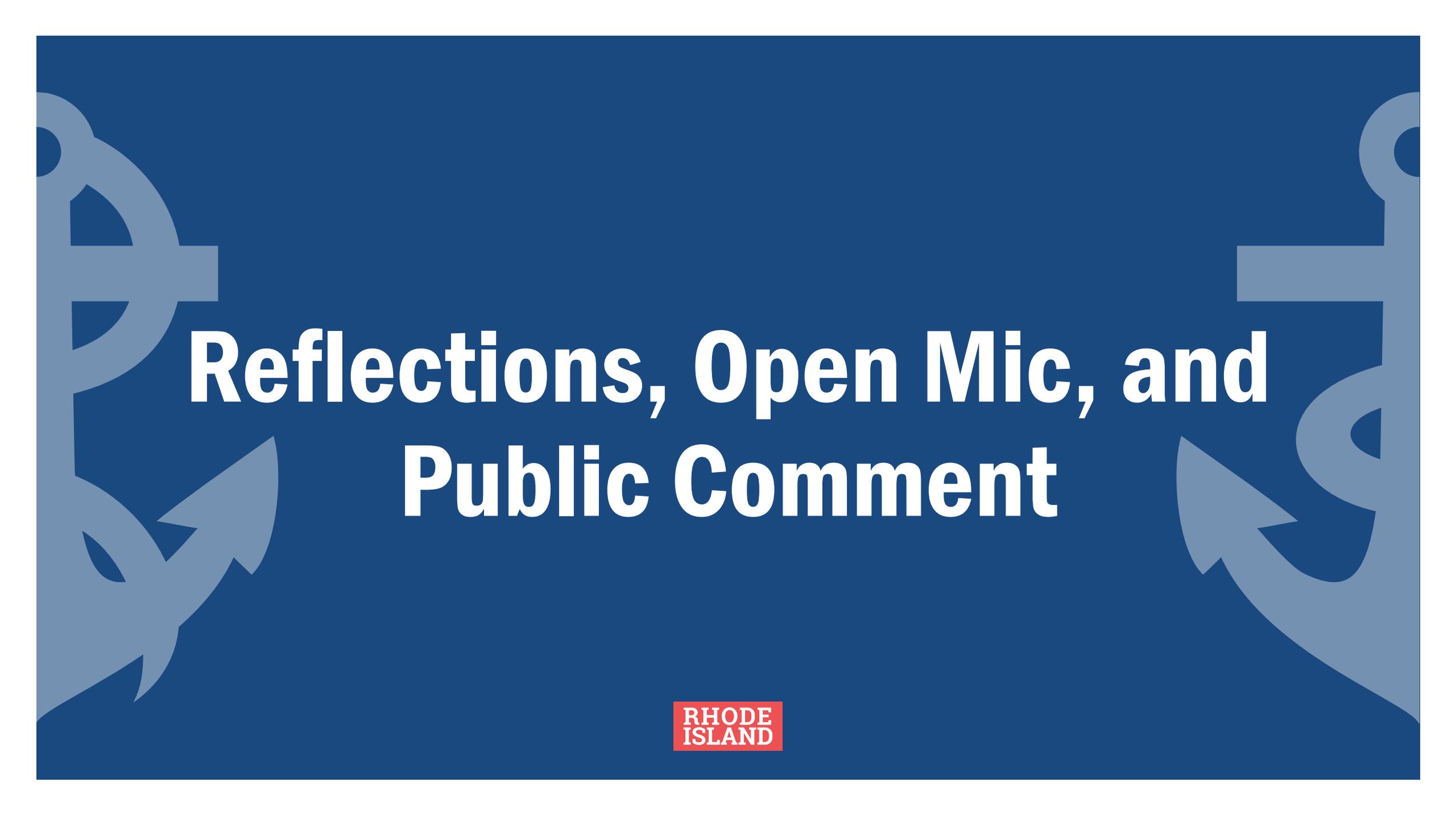


2025 Highlights





More 2025 Highlights



Reflections, Open Mic, and Public Comment

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Networking and Refreshments

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Appendix

2016 – 2017 Highlights

- Rhode Island's Good Samaritan law was [reinstated and expanded](#).
- [PreventOverdoseRI.org](#) was launched to provide [publicly available data](#), local resources, and information to Rhode Islanders.
- A second [Executive Order](#) was signed expanding the Task Force to increase access to treatment and naloxone and established a Family Task Force.
- The first, statewide [Community Overdose Engagement \(CODE\) Summit](#) convened.
- 2017 first year where overdoses went down since task force was established.

2018 – 2019 Highlights

- Rebecca Boss, Director of BHDDH, and Tom Coderre, Governor’s Office Senior Advisor, were appointed as new State Agency Task Force Co-Chairs.
- The Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative was launched.
- The State’s [second CODE Summit convened](#).
- The [Community First Responder Program](#) began at the University of Rhode Island.
- The Racial Equity and Harm Reduction Work Groups were established.
- Legislature passed a \$5 million Opioid Stewardship Fund.

2020 – 2021 Highlights

- Statewide community organizations increased critical overdose prevention and mobile outreach services.
- Rhode Island launched the [Buprenorphine Hotline](#), a 24/7 phone line with English and Spanish telehealth services to increase “treatment on demand.”
- Governor McKee signed [several health-related bills into law](#) relating to the overdose crisis, including [a legislation to explore the establishment of a harm reduction pilot program](#).
- EOHHS, RIDOH, and BHDDH hosted [a third online CODE meeting](#).
- EOHHS presented an [Addiction and Overdose Evidence Update](#).

2022 – 2023 Highlights

- Governor Dan McKee [announced an expansion](#) of the Overdose Task Force with [Executive Order 22-35](#).
 - Cathy Schultz was named the first director of the Overdose Task Force.
 - Thomas Joyce was appointed as the Task Force Community Co-Chair.
- [Rhode Island overdose deaths decreased 7.3 % in 2023](#), the first decrease seen in four years.
- The Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee was established and [allocated \\$20 million in opioid settlement funds](#) for SFY 2023 and adopted the Task Force Strategic Plan.

2024 Highlights

- Rhode Island saw a [decrease in drug overdose deaths](#), continuing a two-year decline in 2024. [Overdose deaths in Rhode Island](#) dropped 25% since 2022 - falling to levels not seen since before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Dr. Jerry Larkin, Director of Health, and Richard Leclerc, BHDDH Director, joined the Overdose Task Force as State Agency Co-Chairs.
- RIDOH deployed a targeted overdose prevention text message campaign to Rhode Islanders living in overdose hot spots.

2025 Highlights

- Alex Gautieri was appointed as the new Overdose Task Force Community Co-Chair.
- Project Weber/RENEW opened the [first State-sanctioned and regulated Overdose Prevention Center](#).
- Rhode Island's January 2025 to June 2025 data show a 33% decrease in all overdose deaths compared to the first six months of 2024.
- Dr. Philip Chan, RIDOH's Consultant Medical Director and member of the Overdose Task Force, [discussed](#) the State's public awareness campaign, [No Matter Why You Use](#), intended for middle-aged and older adults.