

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder in a Criminal Legal Setting: Recommendations from Stakeholder Interviews

In 2019, collaborators in North Carolina began work to implement a medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) program at the Durham County Detention Center (DCDC). The following recommendations and table of strategies to address common challenges are based on lessons learned from interviews conducted with stakeholders involved in design, implementation, and provision of the program. These findings may be useful for stakeholders working with criminal legal settings interested in implementing MOUD in their facility.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Assess available local resources, especially for linking individuals to care post-release.

Identify champions that can advocate for the importance of MOUD and help design and implement the program. Some helpful champions may include:

- Leadership within the criminal legal setting
- Local MOUD providers
- Individuals with prior experience implementing MOUD in criminal legal settings
- Individuals working with organizations that provide supportive services

Engage diverse stakeholders in the design and implementation process. Important stakeholders to consider include:

- Individuals with lived experiences
- Corrections facility staff and leadership
- Health care providers in corrections facilities
- Community Corrections or other local organizations charged with supervising individuals on probation, parole, or post-release supervision

- Local physicians and community MOUD providers
- Local and state public health and social service agencies
- Local and state organizations that provide support for social/structural drivers of health
- Harm reduction and direct service organizations
- State Opioid Treatment Authority
- University researchers and evaluators

Collaborate closely with community MOUD providers to formalize linkages to care for individuals leaving the criminal legal setting, and involve peer support in this process.

Provide ongoing education on MOUD and harm reduction principles to address stigma related to substance use for all involved in planning, implementation, and provision of the program.

Include procedures for data collection and evaluation plans to measure reach and impact of the program.

STRATEGIES FOR TO ADDRESS COMMON CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE	POTENTIAL SOLUTION
Getting key stakeholders and leadership engaged and supportive of MOUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite diverse stakeholders to the table and ensure time and funding is devoted to relationship building • Facilitate formal stakeholder meetings regularly that generate action items and follow up on progress • Consult stakeholders with experience implementing MOUD in other criminal legal settings
Stigma and misinformation about substance use and MOUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train stakeholders and corrections staff on MOUD and SUD focusing on harm reduction principles on an ongoing basis • Organize facilitated meetings to make space for ongoing conversations to address hesitancy about MOUD • Engage local harm reduction stakeholders and people with lived experience in planning and implementation
Navigating access to services post-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund peer support specialist positions to support individuals leaving correctional facilities • Fund bridge counselors to follow up with individuals post release and if necessary, help them reengage in care
Lack of health insurance and cost of health services for individuals post-release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with local federally qualified health centers that work with uninsured patients • Do your research – are there programs in your area that provide financial support for MOUD or other health care? • Hire peer support specialists to help individuals access care and identify affordable care options
Availability of MOUD providers in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with local providers and explore options for telemedicine or group visits to maximize capacity • Tailor your program to the MOUD resources available in your community
Sustainable funding for MOUD programming (especially staffing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with local universities or other organizations with grant writing and evaluation experience • Involve local and state level stakeholders from public health and social service agencies in program planning • Collect program outcome data to help advocate for the program budget to be included in county or state budgets
Regulations around providing methadone as an option for MOUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with local opioid treatment programs (OTP), that can provide methadone to individuals in the corrections facility • Tailor your program to the OTP resources available in your community • Work with stakeholders from your State Opioid Treatment Authority to understand how your facility could become an OTP
Transferring of incarcerated individuals to other facilities that may not provide MOUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for standardized requirements for providing MOUD in criminal legal settings throughout your state and the country • Share successes and lessons learned from your program to support other criminal legal settings implementing MOUD
Shifting priorities during COVID	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share data on local overdose rates and program outcomes to advocate for the importance of providing MOUD in the criminal legal setting