



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

Senator Gustavo Rivera on NYC Health Department's 2021 Data on Severe Overdose Epidemic

GUSTAVO RIVERA January 13, 2023

| ISSUE: **OPIOID EPIDEMIC, OVERDOSE DEATH, OVERDOSE PREVENTION CENTERS**

"The data released yesterday by our City's Health Department shows unprecedented overdose and fatality levels in NYC that are beyond heartbreaking. The **report** clearly indicates that our tempered approach is not working. According to the report, we lost 2,668 people to overdose in 2021, up 78% from 2019 and 27% from 2020. The Bronx is bearing the brunt of this epidemic with the highest rates of overdose death, concentrated in the communities I serve where poverty and underinvestment are rampant.

We urgently need a robust response to this crisis including evidence-based measures to keep New Yorkers who use drugs alive and provide the healthcare and support they need. I am very concerned that Governor Hochul's administration has disregarded overdose prevention centers as a key component in fighting the opioid overdose crisis despite being a proven and vital approach.

Overdose Prevention Centers do not enable drug use. Period.

They offer destigmatized, private settings that save people's lives while offering harm reduction services, food, showers, laundry, and safety. The historic first-in-the-nation facilities operated by OnPoint NYC have prevented over 650 overdoses since their opening in

2022. Those are 650 people who would likely not be alive today if they had overdosed somewhere in the community at large.

Last month, the Hochul Administration rejected the Opioid Settlement Fund Advisory Board's recommendation to allocate money from the Opioid Settlement Fund to expand these centers, claiming they violate federal and state law. This is a tragic mistake. Rhode Island, for instance, has already earmarked \$2 million from its settlement dollars for their Overdose Prevention Centers expected to open in the near future. New York should follow suit especially since, our State has historically been a vanguard in public health crises when we recognized the need to act boldly and decisively. We have an obligation to continue that legacy now.

I call on the Hochul administration to embrace Overdose Prevention Centers and harm reduction strategies. I remain ready and willing to work with her office and with every stakeholder who wants to stop overdose deaths and earnestly address this public health crisis. For the sake of thousands of New Yorkers we've lost to overdose and those grieving the loss of loved ones, we must work in partnership to bring an end to the agony of these senseless deaths."