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EXPLAINER

Harm Reduction Policies Are Adopted Inconsistently Across Substances

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“Harm reduction is a pragmatic approach that gives people the knowledge and resources to stay safer—even when they continue engaging in risky behaviors.”

Most potential harms attributable to substance use stem from two distinct causes of risk: the substance itself (including how it is used) and the prohibition of the substances or related equipment. Harm reduction has been shown to effectively mitigate the risks associated with a wide range of behaviors and substances. Some common harm reduction interventions include:

Naloxone (opioid antidote) distribution



Electronic nicotine delivery system (ENDS) products



Regulated cannabis markets



Syringe services programs (SSPs)



RSI examined state harm reduction policies targeting three substances: tobacco, opioids, and cannabis.

THE POLICIES		
TOBACCO	OPIOIDS	CANNABIS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State bans on flavored ENDS products States with local bans on flavored ENDS products States with local bans on all ENDS products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State authorization of SSPs State decriminalization of drug-checking equipment State regulation of methadone that exceeds federal guidelines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State legalization of medical cannabis (including low THC/CBD products) State legalization of regulated adult-use cannabis markets
<p>THR Policy in All States + D.C.</p> <p>Restrictive (11.8%)</p> <p>Moderate (13.7%)</p> <p>Permissive (74.5%)</p>	<p>OHR Policy in All States + D.C.</p> <p>Restrictive (15.7%)</p> <p>Moderate (37.3%)</p> <p>Permissive (47.1%)</p>	<p>Cannabis Policy in All States + D.C.</p> <p>Restrictive (23.5%)</p> <p>Moderate (29.4%)</p> <p>Permissive (47.1%)</p>

Regardless of Partisan Leanings, States Are Inconsistent in Their Adoption of Harm Reduction Policies*

Republican states tend to be fairly permissive of tobacco harm reduction (THR) but moderate to restrictive of opioid harm reduction (OHR) and regulated cannabis. Democratic states lean the opposite way, with laws that are more permissive of OHR and regulated cannabis markets but more restrictive of reduced-risk nicotine products.

REPUBLICAN State Governments (23 States)	THR	OHR	Cannabis	DEMOCRAT State Governments (16 States + D.C.)	THR	OHR	Cannabis	DIVIDED State Governments (10 States)	THR	OHR	Cannabis	
	Permissive Number of States	21 (91%)	5 (22%)		4 (17%)	Permissive Number of States + D.C.	6 (35%)		13 (76%)	15 (88%)	Permissive Number of States	10 (100%)
	Moderate Number of States	2 (9%)	12 (52%)	11 (48%)	Moderate Number of States + D.C.	5 (30%)	4 (24%)	2 (12%)	Moderate Number of States	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)
	Restrictive Number of States	0 (0%)	6 (26%)	8 (35%)	Restrictive Number of States + D.C.	6 (35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	Restrictive Number of States	0 (0%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)

* 49 states + D.C. are represented above. Nebraska does not recognize party affiliations; however, they were rated as Permissive on THR, Moderate on OHR, and Restrictive on cannabis, which is in line with R-dominated states.

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