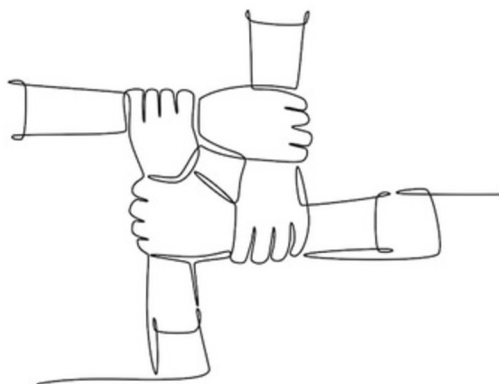


“Harm Reduction and Social Service Workers”

Episode Overview

In the final episode this season, I talk about harm reduction and social service workers’ roles, responsibilities, and reactions to overdose. I talk about the emotional toll of this work, some of the challenges social service workers face, strategies they use, and how their work is evolving in response to overdoses in the community.



- The emotional impact of working in harm reduction and social services is profound. Workers in supervised consumption settings experience serious emotional effects from repeated exposure to overdoses.
- Burnout can be structurally driven. People with lived experience (PWLE) at overdose-prevention sites often face burnout due to precarious working conditions, such as low pay and lack of benefits.
- Collaborative models, such as the Tempe First Responder Opioid Recovery Project in Arizona, assemble law enforcement, peer counselors, and public health professionals to save lives.

TAKEAWAYS

- Harm-reduction workers often lack access to consistent emotional and workplace support, increasing their risk of burnout and other negative effects.
- PWLE are essential—they bring trust and insight to overdose response efforts but often experience inequality in the workplace.
- Collaboration + investment = results. Programs that integrate community voices, professional support, and public systems show potential for sustainable overdose responses.

References & Future Reading

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