

# How effective and implementable are state-level naloxone access policies?



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## THE ISSUE

All states have adopted laws to increase access to naloxone, an opioid overdose medication that can save an individual's life if administered quickly. However, the laws differ on multiple dimensions, which may differentially affect opioid-related mortality and whether these effects are distributed equitably.



## STUDY FOCUS

To help inform decisions about naloxone access policies, OPTIC researchers gathered expert consensus on the effectiveness and implementability of various state-level naloxone strategies. Using the online ExpertLens platform, the study team conducted two simultaneous panels comprising 46 key stakeholders—advocates, healthcare providers, social service practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. The Effectiveness Panel rated the likely effects of 15 types of policies on naloxone pharmacy distribution, prevalence of opioid use disorders, non-fatal opioid-related overdoses, and opioid-related overdose mortality. The Implementation Panel rated the same policies on acceptability, feasibility, affordability, and equitability. To identify contextual factors that might influence a policy's effect, the team also solicited and analyzed the reasons that the experts cited for their ratings.

- Experts identified three policies likely to reduce fatal overdoses:
  - Statewide orders to dispense naloxone without a patient-specific prescription
  - Allowing naloxone to be distributed over the counter
  - Providing free naloxone to state residents through pharmacies
- Only statewide orders authorizing pharmacies to dispense naloxone without a patient-specific prescription were considered both highly effective in reducing fatal overdoses, highly implementable across all criteria, and highly equitable
- Free naloxone was considered highly equitable but only moderately acceptable, feasible, and affordable
- Regarding implementation, experts thought:
  - Reducing opioid-related mortality will require sustained efforts to increase population-level access to naloxone.
  - Policies that significantly reduced overdose mortality are unlikely to have substantial unintended public health consequences such as increased opioid use.
  - Any policy will face implementation barriers, including the affordability of naloxone, an inequitable health care system, and the stigma associated with opioid use and treatment.
  - Targeting settings beyond retail pharmacies would help address barriers to equitable access to naloxone.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Experts believed that statewide standing orders for naloxone are acceptable, feasible, affordable, equitable, and effective in reducing opioid-related mortality. States without such policies may want to consider implementing them. All policies would face implementation challenges related to costs and reaching vulnerable populations.

Smart R, Grant S. Effectiveness and implementability of state-level naloxone access policies: Expert consensus from an online modified-Delphi process. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 98, December 2021, 103383. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP68824.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP68824.html)

Grant S, Smart R. Expert views on state-level naloxone access laws: a qualitative analysis of an online modified-Delphi process. *Harm Reduct J*. 2022 Jun 8;19(1):64. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/external\\_publications/EP69032.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP69032.html)

