

## Attachment D: Focus group guide for people experiencing homelessness who have a history of overdose

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### Focus group script

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a researcher from the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS), a program funded by the government to reduce overdose and saves lives. You are being asked to participate in a group conversation. Using this form, give you an overview of the project so that you can make an informed choice about participating.

**Project overview:** The ORS is working with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on a study to understand factors contributing to overdose deaths among people experiencing homelessness, what is being done at the community level to respond, and how law enforcement can be equipped to better support these efforts. The ultimate goal is to make recommendations for improving overdose prevention services for people experiencing homelessness. We are particularly interested in your experiences using overdose prevention services and your ideas about how homelessness may affect overdose risk. We are interested in your opinion. There are no right or wrong answers.

**Risks and Discomforts:** You will be asked to share your experiences and perspectives. There may be some questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

**Benefits:** There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, but the information you give us will inform recommendations for improving services for people experiencing homelessness who use drugs. Findings from this study could lead to a reduction in overdose deaths in your community.

**Compensation:** You will receive a \$25 gift card for your participation.

**Confidentiality:** Everything you tell us will be kept confidential and private to the extent allowable by law. We will not share your name with anyone who is not physically present here today. We will not use your name in any reports or public presentations. We also ask that you

please not say your names (at least not your real names) or share with others outside of this room the names or identities of your fellow participants (if known) or any information they share.

With your permission, we would like to record our conversation. We do this simply to make sure that we capture all of the information that you share and so we can listen to what you have to say and not miss anything important. The recording will be stored safely on my computer until it is written out, after which it will be destroyed. The recording helps the study team in writing their report and is used for that purpose only. We will also take notes (in case the recording does not work).

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal from the Study:** This focus group is voluntary. You have the right to leave the group or decline to take part in the study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

### **Contact Information**

Contact the project lead, Nancy Worthington, at 470-851-6012 if you have any questions about this project or your part in it.

Any questions before we continue?

**Ground rules:** Lastly, I want to establish some ground rules for today's discussion to ensure a safe and comfortable space for everyone.

1. Anything said here, stays here.
2. Let's all take turns in speaking and try not to talk over people. Because we want to hear from everyone, I might call on someone specifically to share if we're hearing a lot from one person. If you don't want to share, that's ok too. Feel free to pass on a question.
3. It's okay to disagree. Everyone has their own opinions, but please be respectful of the opinions of others.
4. Please turn off your cell phone and put them away so that they don't disturb the group.
5. Are there any rules you have questions about or others you'd like to add?

### **Begin recording: State your name (interviewer's name), date, and then group ID Consent & Authorization**

Do you agree to participate in the interview?

Do you agree to have the interview audio-recorded?

Icebreaker question: TBD

Now I'm going to ask about your current situation and your community.

1. How long have you been experiencing homelessness?

- Are you sheltered or unsheltered?
2. Briefly tell us what a typical day in your life looks like.
    - Where do you typically sleep, eat, and spend time?

Now, I'm going to ask you about different types of services.

3. Are you aware of any overdose prevention, harm reduction, or drug treatment services in your community?
  - What are they and where or how do you access them?
  - Do you use these services?
  - What are your thoughts about these services?
4. What are people experiencing homelessness doing around here to prevent overdose for themselves and each other, if anything?
5. Are you aware of any services that provide shelter or help people find housing in your community?
  - What are they and where or how do you access them?
  - Do you use these services?
  - What are your thoughts about these services?

Now, I'm going to ask you about any barriers to overdose prevention.

6. What do you think keeps people experiencing homelessness from using tools to reduce overdose risk? Tools include using drugs with a buddy, having naloxone on hand, and testing drugs prior to use.
7. What do you think prevents people experiencing homelessness from using the services we've discussed?

Now, I'm going to ask about solutions.

8. What actions need to be taken to help people experiencing homelessness use services to reduce overdose risk or get treatment if they want to?
  - What are your thoughts on providing services via mobile vans or street outreach teams or in places like shelters, motels/hotels, or homeless encampments?
9. What are some ways doctors or service providers can better support you?

This part of the discussion is about your drug use and experiences with overdose, topics that can be sensitive and difficult to discuss. Please let us know if you start to feel uncomfortable, need support, or wish to leave the group. Sharing your opinions and experiences, however, can help the community.

10. Thinking about the last time you used drugs, where and with whom did you use?
  - Is that typical for you?
  - How has the experience of homelessness changed what drugs you use or how you use them, if at all?

- How has the experience of homelessness contributed to overdose, if at all?
11. How often do you witness or hear about overdoses occurring among people experiencing homelessness in this community? What do you think are the reasons for this?
  12. Think about a time in the last year that you overdosed while you were experiencing homelessness, or you witnessed someone else overdose while they were experiencing homelessness.
    - What do you believe contributed to the overdose?
    - What was going on in your/their life at the time that may have contributed to the event?

Now I'm going to ask about another topic that can be sensitive and difficult to discuss: law enforcement. Once again, let us know if you need support or wish to leave the group.

13. Tell me about any experiences you have had with law enforcement when you've been sleeping, eating, sitting, or asking for help in public places.
  - What was the outcome?
  - How did this affect you?
14. Tell me about any experiences you have had living an encampment that was cleared by law enforcement.
  - How did this affect you?
  - How did the experience change how you use drugs, if at all?
15. Tell me about any experiences you have had with EMS.
16. What are some ways law enforcement or EMS can better support you?
  - What roles should law enforcement or EMS play in communities where overdose is common?
17. Is there anything else you'd recommend to help reduce overdose among people experiencing homelessness?
18. Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the focus group. Your insights were invaluable and will help us develop recommendations for improving overdose prevention services for people experiencing homelessness.