

2025 INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

PARTNERS' REPORT

PENINGTON INSTITUTE

International Overdose Awareness Day
31 August

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Cover image: Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network IOAD 2025 event, Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Vimbai Pamela Majaha.

PENINGTON INSTITUTE

International Overdose Awareness Day
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CONTENTS

Introduction **2**

About International Overdose Awareness Day 3

2025 Campaign snapshot **4**

IOAD 2025 theme: One big family, driven by hope 6

Campaign resources 7

Charting our impact **9**

Why IOAD matters 10

Campaign participation 12

Campaign advocacy 14

Events in 2025 16

Global highlights 20

Community and partner collaboration 21

With gratitude **22**

A milestone in 2026 **23**

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the impact of the 2025 International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) campaign, highlighting the collective achievements of the global community fighting to end overdose.

Through the theme ‘One big family, driven by hope’, the IOAD 2025 campaign emphasized that although the overdose crisis touches every corner of the globe, none of us face it alone. Families, communities, and nations came together, bound by a shared determination to save lives and minimize harm.

Hope was not just our message, but our driving force – carrying us through grief, igniting resilience, and fuelling action.

Although official reporting has indicated a downward trend in overdose fatalities in many parts of the world – including countries which have been severely affected by the overdose crisis, such as the United States, Canada, and Scotland – the IOAD community remains resolute that even one death or injury due to overdose is one too many.

This year, communities around the world honored loved ones lost, shared overdose prevention and response knowledge, and called for policies grounded in compassion and evidence.

This was done through the extraordinary commitment and determination of the IOAD community, which wants to see change happen and will not stop until no more lives are lost to preventable overdose. And we did this as one global family.



ABOUT INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

How the campaign works to achieve our vision.

Every August 31, International Overdose Awareness Day (IOAD) unites a global community to take action on overdose. It is a powerful global platform which provides tools and resources, and a vital space in which communities can connect and collaborate.

Through events, public conversations and community actions, communities honor lives lost, educate their families, friends and peers, and explore and share evidence-based overdose prevention solutions.

Guiding principles

- Overdose can and must be prevented
- Overdose prevention solutions exist – let's use them
- Criminalizing drug use hasn't worked. Compassionate alternatives must be pursued
- Policy and legislation must exist to protect individuals and communities, and ensure basic human rights and needs are met
- Everyone has a right to respectful and comprehensive health care
- Only a community-wide effort can end overdose

Campaign goals

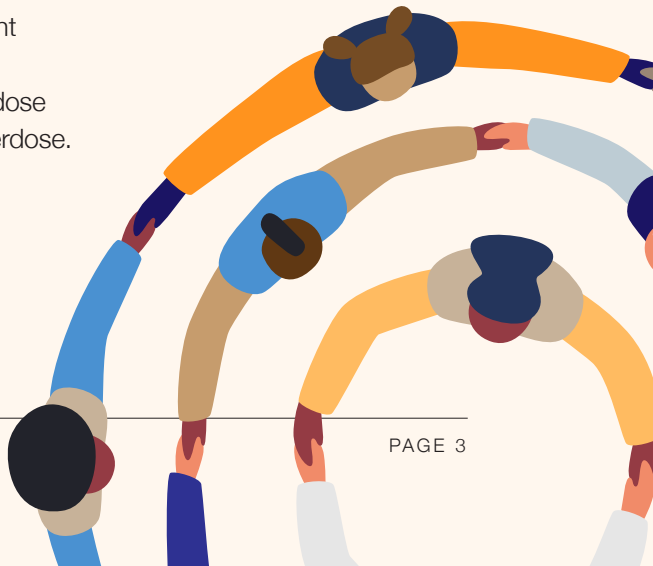
Every year IOAD aims to:

- amplify the conversation about overdose
- create space in which communities can heal together
- share knowledge of evidence-based overdose prevention initiatives
- encourage whole-of-community involvement in overdose prevention.

Our long-term ambition is that IOAD will help create a world in which:

- overdose is not ignored but treated as a global health issue
- communities have the knowledge and tools they need to prevent overdose
- policies, practices and attitudes shift to support an end to overdose
- governments implement evidence-based policies to reduce overdose.

Penington Institute has been the global convenor of IOAD since 2012. Penington Institute is an independent, drug policy research non-profit committed to freedom from serious drug harms. To find out more, visit **penington.org.au**



2025 CAMPAIGN SNAPSHOT

1,016
RECORDED EVENTS

37
PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

5,000
APPROX. MEDIA MENTIONS

68,000
TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

326,000
WEBSITE VIEWS

850,000
PEOPLE REACHED ACROSS OUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

195+
LANDMARKS LIT UP PURPLE AROUND THE GLOBE

156,000+
ESTIMATED EVENT ATTENDEES

26,000
DOWNLOADS OF EDUCATION AND CAMPAIGN RESOURCES

"WE DIDN'T TALK ABOUT HOW OUR CHILDREN DIED ... WE TALKED ABOUT HOW THEY LIVED AND LOVED. I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THEY DIDN'T JUST DIE BUT THEY LIVED AND THEY LOVED."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent



HONORING LIVES LOST

IOAD at the Ibn Sina Academy in India

In collaboration with the Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Monitoring Centre at Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College (JNMC) and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), the Ibn Sina Academy of Medieval Medicine and Sciences organized a dedicated awareness program, both as a memorial and an educational platform to raise awareness, tackle stigma and call for preventive action and compassionate policy change.

Event highlights:

- Keynote addresses by Prof. Jai Krishna (Al-Falah School of Medical Sciences & Research Centre) and Dr. Syed Ziaur Rahman (JNMC), exploring evidence-based approaches to overdose prevention, mental health awareness, and the role of pharmacological education
- Presentations by JNMC junior residents showcasing research on overdose risks and prevention
- Attendees wore silver badges as a symbolic IOAD gesture of remembrance
- Over 70 participants, and both traditional media and social media coverage.





IOAD 2025 THEME:

ONE BIG FAMILY, DRIVEN BY HOPE

This International Overdose Awareness Day, people around the world came together as one big family to take action on overdose.

The overdose crisis doesn't just shatter families, it fractures communities. The losses go deeper than one person, one family or one neighbourhood. They ripple out into classrooms, workplaces and the spaces we all share. They cross borders between cities, states and nations.

But in a time when people are searching for connection and safety, overdose also reminds us that our lives are deeply intertwined.

We often instinctively protect our own – our children, our parents, our siblings. We believe in second chances for our loved ones but struggle to extend that same compassion to others. But what if we saw each other as one big family, bound not just by blood, but by shared experiences, responsibility and commitment to each other?

This IOAD we imagined a new meaning of what family can be. A family driven by hope, love and action. We were one big family – not just because we share in the pain of loss, but because we share in the power to change what comes next.

This year, we moved beyond awareness. We organized, we showed up, and we took action. Because no one should carry this grief alone. Every story shared, every voice raised and every step we took brought us closer to a future free from overdose.

#OneBigFamily #DrivenByHope #IOAD2025 #EndOverdose

"MY HIGHLIGHT WAS THE THEME ONE BIG FAMILY'. WE WRAPPED OUR EVENT AROUND THAT THEME WITH A CEREMONY AND FLAG RAISING AT TORONTO CITY HALL."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent



CAMPAIGN RESOURCES

One of IOAD's key strengths is providing reliable and accurate resources to the global community. These resources are shared to empower, to spark conversations, to drive stronger campaigns and to save lives. That's why every year we invest in building and sharing high-quality tools which anyone, anywhere can use to raise awareness and take action. In 2025, these resources included:

- **'One big family, driven by hope' campaign kit –** ready-to-use social media graphics and posters to amplify campaign messages
- **Educational toolkit –** resources to deepen understanding of overdose and overdose prevention strategies
- **Overdose response fact sheets –** clear, accessible guides on recognizing and responding to overdose by drug type
- **Media support toolkit –** tips and templates to help communities engage with journalists and secure informed coverage about overdose
- **Advocacy toolkit –** strategies and materials for influencing decision-makers
- **Event merchandise and apparel –** a suite of products available via the IOAD online shop to support event holders and supporters spread the message that we can end overdose
- **Digital assets –** logos and key graphics the community can use to create their own campaign materials

"THE BRANDING IS SPOT ON. WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE POSTERS WITH THE LOGOS PROVIDED BY IOAD AND WORE MATCHING T-SHIRTS TO PROMOTE AN END TO OVERDOSE. THESE BRANDING TECHNIQUES RAISE AWARENESS AND GET PEOPLE INVOLVED."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent

84% of survey respondents said they found the information and resources provided to be useful and/or relevant.



STREET ART FOR CHANGE

Overdose awareness in Finland

In Helsinki, Humaania Päihdepolitiikkaa ry and KAS! Kontula Art School came together for IOAD with a powerful street art event at the Suvilahti graffiti wall. The event used art to call for a shift in Finland's drug policy towards an emphasis on support over punishment.

Event highlights:

- A live legal graffiti piece by a KAS! artist
- Opportunities for the community to pick up a brush and participate
- Artworks remained on display at the Suvilahti graffiti fence until covered with new artworks
- The street art event followed another IOAD event in Pääskylä Park, which featured music, stories and health advice.



CHARTING OUR IMPACT

2025 Community Survey

More than 500 people took part in the 2025 Community Survey, sharing their experiences of IOAD and offering feedback to shape the campaign's future.

The results reaffirmed how much supporters value IOAD, not only as a platform to raise awareness and expand knowledge of overdose prevention, but as a space for open conversation and real connection. Many respondents described the campaign as a rare opportunity to bring people together across communities, to grieve, learn and to collaborate.

"[MY HIGHLIGHT WAS] BRINGING EVERYONE TOGETHER ON A GLOBAL SCALE. MEETING OTHER PEOPLE IN THE DRUG HARM REDUCTION SPACE AND FINDING COMMON GROUND WITH PEOPLE WORKING IN THE ADDICTION SPACE."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent

92% of survey respondents believe that IOAD helps to open up conversations about overdose.

Image: St. Mark's Church event, Frankford, Philadelphia USA.



79% of survey respondents said they feel 'a sense of community' through IOAD.

WHY IOAD MATTERS

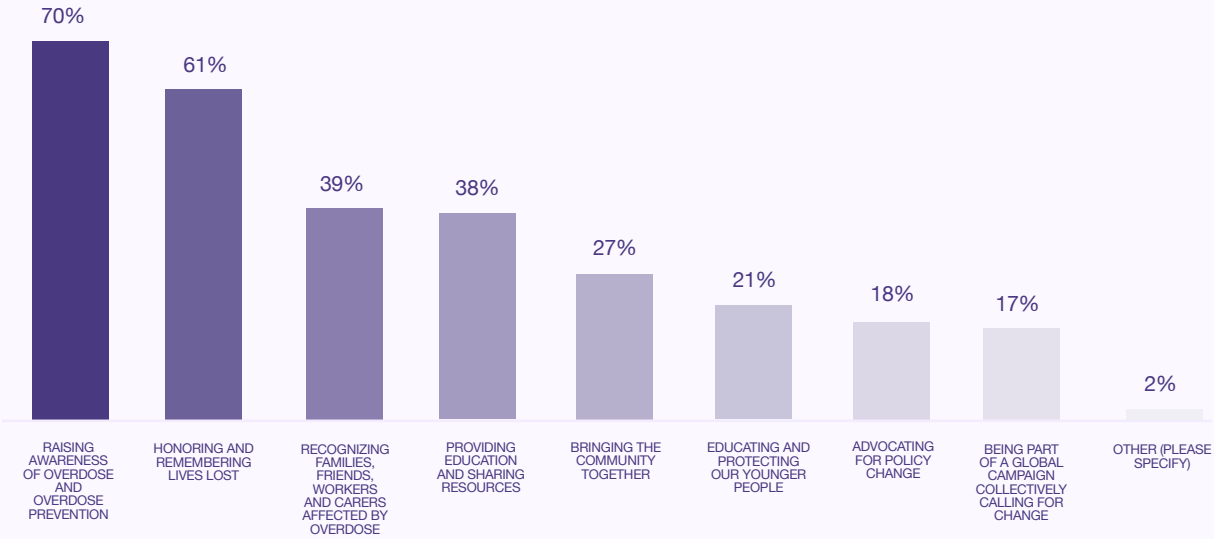
The 2025 survey results show that IOAD is valued first and foremost as a platform for ‘raising awareness of overdose and prevention’ and for ‘honoring and remembering lives lost’. These two themes consistently outpace other reasons for involvement, underscoring that the campaign is about saving lives today while remembering those we’ve already lost.

The community also places strong emphasis on recognizing the many different groups affected by the overdose crisis and on providing education and resources, highlighting the critical need for connection, support, and practical tools within communities.



Image: IOAD banners at the Enfield United Church of Christ, Connecticut USA, 2025

Select your top 3 reasons why IOAD is important to you and/or your community.





REFLECTION + REMEMBRANCE

Connecting on IOAD in Zimbabwe

In Bulawayo, the Lace Boot Initiative for Women Who Use Drugs (LaBWWUD) commemorated IOAD 2025 with a gathering at the GALZ Centre. This event brought together 20 participants — including women, men, and gender-diverse people who use and inject drugs — to reflect, learn, and honor lives lost to overdose.



Photo credit: Tania Marumbwa.

Event highlights:

- Focus group discussions on overdose prevention, harm reduction, and stigma, facilitated by LaBWWUD peer educators
- Practical training on recognizing overdose signs, administering naloxone, and placing someone in the recovery position
- Distribution of IOAD fact sheets and harm reduction materials
- A candlelight vigil to foster healing and connection, and renewed advocacy.

The event strengthened peer networks, built local knowledge on overdose response, and reaffirmed the importance of inclusive, community-led harm reduction in Zimbabwe.

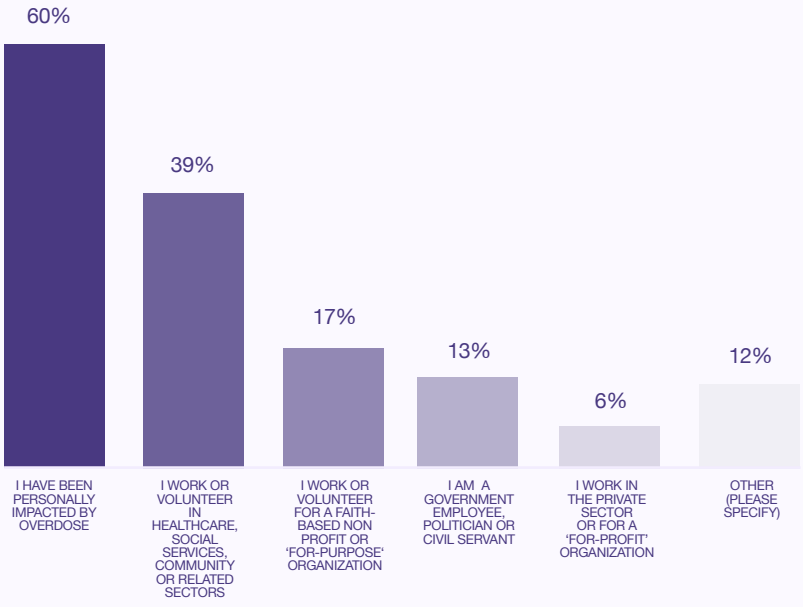


CAMPAIGN PARTICIPATION

In 2025, most IOAD participants identified as being personally impacted by overdose, with strong involvement from people working in healthcare, social services and community sectors, alongside representation from government, faith-based and non-profit organizations, the private sector, and other areas.

25% of registered event holders said 2025 was the first year they had held an event.

What best describes you in relation to IOAD? (Select up to two)



More than half of survey respondents (55%) have been engaged with IOAD for 2–5 years, with many others involved for longer. At the same time, nearly one in five (18%) were new to IOAD in 2025. These results underscore both the strength of long-term commitment to the campaign, and the reality that too many people continue to be newly touched by overdose.

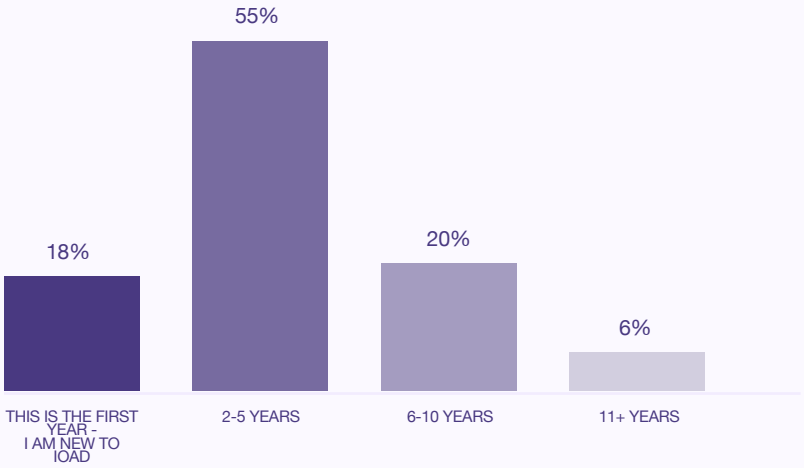


Image: Recovery Alberta, Alberta Health Services event, Calgary, Canada. Photo credit: Jenna Wyshynski.



Image: IOAD community gathering, Colorado, USA. Photo credit: Lex Chamizo.

How many years have you taken part in IOAD? (‘Taking part’ can be anything from following us on social media to running an event)

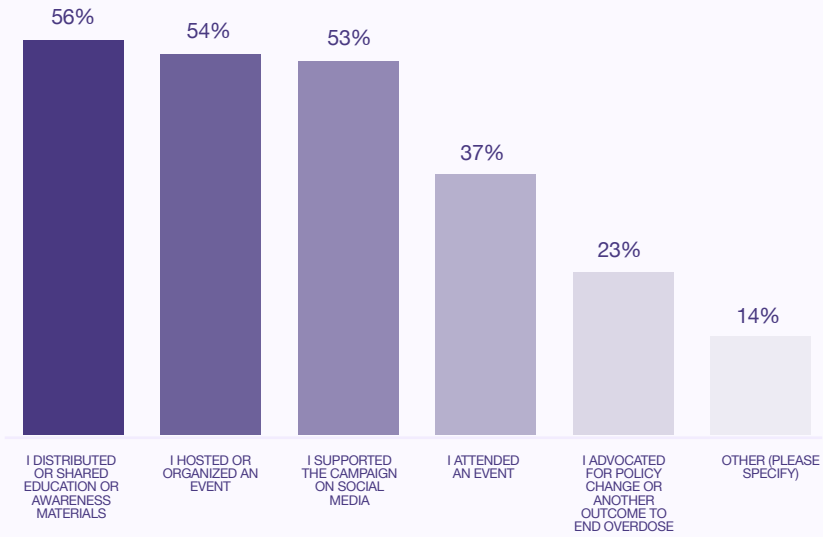


IOAD participation was as diverse and active in 2025 as always. More than half of Community Survey respondents hosted events, shared educational resources, or amplified the campaign on social media. More than a third of respondents attended an event, while nearly a quarter engaged in direct advocacy for policy change.



Image: New Bronville NGO event, Free State, South Africa. Credit: Clayton.

How did you take part in IOAD this year? (Select all that apply)



CAMPAIGN ADVOCACY

Changing the conversation on drugs and overdose needs more than awareness — it also requires focused, sustained advocacy. The IOAD campaign helps foster advocacy efforts through activities such as:

- Lobbying elected representatives for fairer, evidence-based drug policies
- Bringing decision-makers like politicians, police, and local leaders into the room at events
- Hosting public awareness events and skill-building workshops
- Engaging local media to spotlight overdose issues
- Lighting up landmarks in purple to spread the message far and wide
- Securing official government proclamations to recognize IOAD
- Producing videos and creative content to reach new audiences
- Sharing resources and information online to keep communities informed

These efforts are powerful. Nearly 70% of participants rated their advocacy as 'effective' or 'very effective', and 95% said they were committed to continuing in 2026. The flow-on impact of this dedication is undeniable. Every action can help shift attitudes and policies, and help save lives.

"WE ARE HONORED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS WORLD WIDE EVENT. I SPOKE OF OHANA AND FAMILY AND HOW WE ARE ALL ONE BIG FAMILY, DRIVEN BY HOPE."

- Irene, Flags of Hope, Canada

91% of respondents believe that IOAD is an important platform from which to advocate for change.





Images: Black CAP, ACCHO, Families for Addiction Recovery, and Flags of Hope flag-raising event, Toronto, Canada.



ONE BIG FAMILY IN ACTION

Overdose awareness at Queensland's Parliament House in Australia

In Brisbane, QuIVAA, QuIHN, and the Queensland Mental Health Commission united to host an IOAD event at Queensland's Parliament House. Bringing together peers, families, healthcare professionals, and other advocates, the event embodied this year's theme, 'One big family, driven by hope,' in both message and spirit.

Event highlights:

- A gathering at Parliament House's Undumbi Room to celebrate compassion, unity, and collective responsibility in ending overdose
- Reflections on the profound community impact of overdose and the shared power of action and hope
- A call for sustained collaboration across government, health, and community sectors to reduce stigma and save lives.

The event demonstrated how policy spaces and peer voices can come together to drive meaningful change, reminding all that no one should carry their grief alone and that every story shared helps build a future free from the tragedy of overdose.







EVENTS IN 2025

1,016 events were recorded for 2025. We saw event activity in 37 countries and estimate more than 156,000 people attended IOAD events. Most registered events displayed on the IOAD website global event map were run by organizations (92%) and were public events (95%). 72% of registered event holders had hosted events in the past for IOAD.

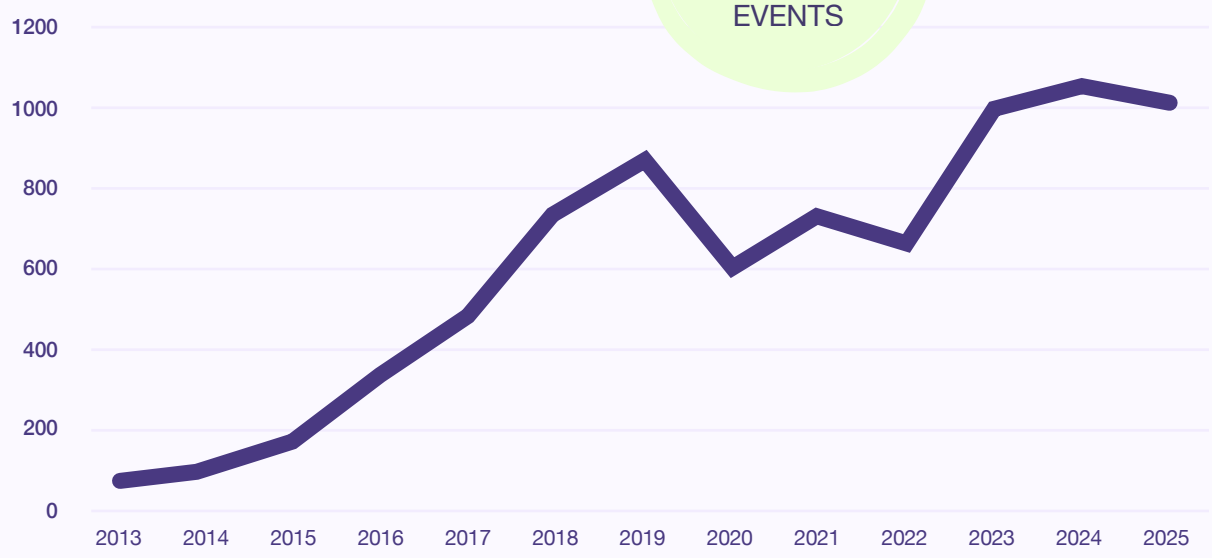
This event activity maintains the momentum of recent years. It's also noticeably higher than the reduced activity seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting the ongoing toll of overdose in communities around the globe and the continuing urgency of positive change.

"WE HAD OVER 500 PEOPLE ATTEND NORTH TX OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY AND FEEDBACK FROM SOME OF THE ATTENDEES WAS VERY REASSURING THAT WE ARE PROVIDING SUPPORT AND RESOURCES TO OUR COMMUNITY."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent

1,016+
RECORDED EVENTS

Number of recorded events over time



EVENT HOLDER MOTIVATION

In 2025, most IOAD events were motivated by a commitment to reduce stigma (62%), raise awareness about overdose (53%), and honor the lives of those lost (46%). Many also sought to show solidarity and support within their communities (43%), with education and training a key focus for a third of organizers. These findings highlight IOAD's role as a crucial platform for connection, remembrance, and learning, while equipping communities to address overdose with compassion and knowledge.

"(IT WAS) GREAT TO SEE 3X TURNOUT FROM LAST YEAR. PEOPLE ARE TALKING TO ME ABOUT HOW GREAT THE EVENT WAS. FEELS GOOD THAT PEOPLE ARE STILL TALKING ABOUT IT AND ABOUT NEXT YEAR."

- 2025 Community Survey respondent

What was the main reason you held an event or activity? (select up to 3)

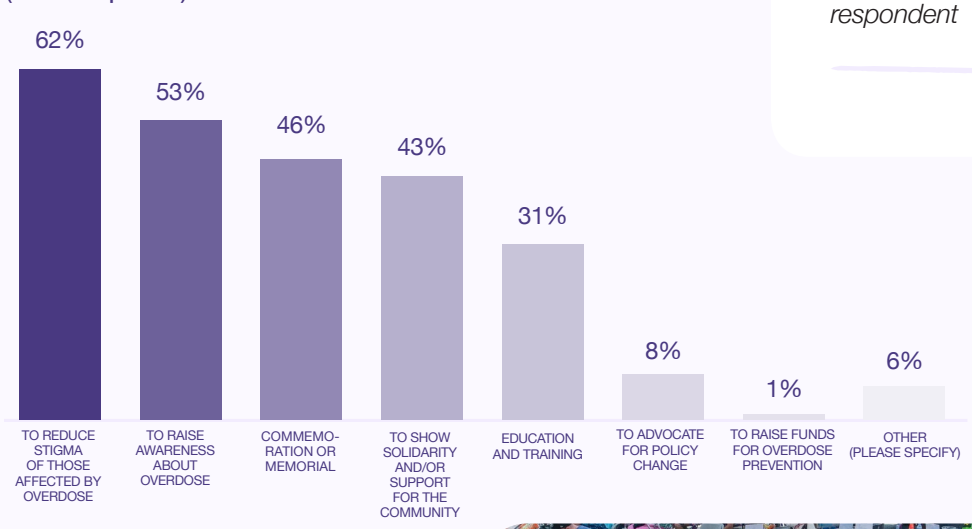


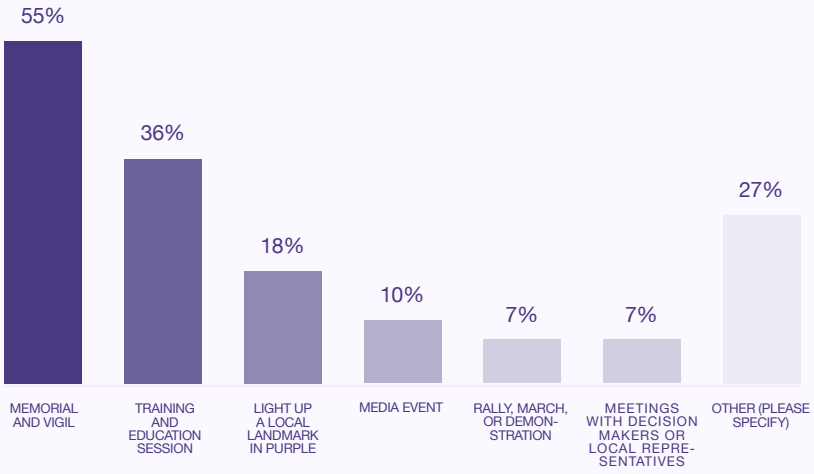


Image: 'Die-in' protest hosted by The Village Clinic, Courtenay, Canada. Photo credit: Dr Eva Hemmerich

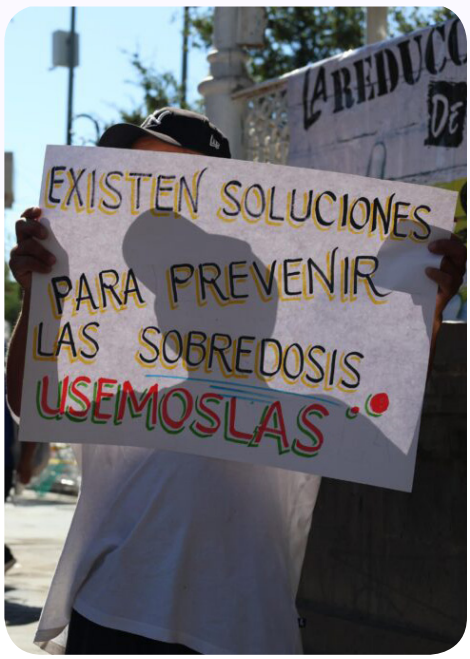
EVENT FORMATS

Events this year featured an impressive diversity of formats, from candlelight vigils and naloxone training sessions, to family fun fairs and media events.

What was the format of your main event or activity? (select up to 2)







Images: Programa Compañeros event, Juárez, Mexico. Photo credit: Favia Lucero. Courtesy: La Verdad Juárez.



A CONCRETE TRIBUTE

Remembering those lost in Tennessee, USA

In Knoxville, Tennessee Metro Drug Coalition hosted an unforgettable event with two purple cement trucks wrapped in the names of loved ones lost to overdose. This creative memorial transformed these everyday vehicles into symbols of remembrance, resilience, and solidarity against the overdose crisis.









Photo credit: Romelia Photography.

Event highlights:

- Community members submitted 382 names from all 50 states to be displayed on the trucks, representing a staggering national loss and the sweeping reach of the overdose crisis
- The trucks were displayed at Lakeshore Park's Marble Hall, part of Knoxville's IOAD gathering, which also raised funds for the Metro Drug Coalition's Recovery Housing Support Fund
- Attendees were encouraged to share photos, memories and stories, emphasizing the healing power of remembrance and the fight against stigma surrounding drug-related deaths
- The event highlighted the importance of community advocacy and support, reminding attendees to care for loved ones and raise awareness before tragedy strikes.

The purple cement trucks created a striking and mobile statement of grief, remembrance, and collective action. It not only honored those lost locally but also showed that overdose is a far-reaching crisis demanding empathy, awareness, and proactive intervention.

GLOBAL HIGHLIGHTS



Every action, whether small or large, contributes to the collective impact of IOAD. Here are just a few of the many highlights of the 2025 campaign from around the world:

CANADA:
The Minister for Health issued a statement reinforcing the Government's commitment to reducing the overdose toll, following a recent decline in reported overdose deaths in Canada.

IRELAND:
The HSE (Health Service Executive), National Ambulance Service (NAS) and Alternative Prehospital Pathway (APP) launched a new program providing naloxone to people who have overdosed but who decline ambulance transport to hospital.

UKRAINE:
A network of people who use drugs mobilized communities to take part in an online flash mob for IOAD 2025, writing or recording short tributes for loved ones who had died from, or been harmed by, overdose.

ENGLAND, UK:
Clinicians, policymakers and researchers gathered at King's College London to discuss the latest innovations and strategies to detect and prevent opioid overdoses.

AFGHANISTAN:
A small group met discreetly (due to Taliban restrictions) to mark IOAD.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:
Various states officially proclaimed August 31 as International Overdose Awareness Day, including New Jersey, Wisconsin and Maryland.

SCOTLAND, UK:
The Scottish Drug Forum convened more than 300 people with lived experience, families, third-sector workers, researchers and politicians for a two-day conference focused on strategies to reduce drug-related deaths in Scotland and beyond.

GREECE:
In Athens, Steps NGO hosted a public film screening of the 2017 documentary 'Heroin(e)', followed by a discussion with community members about overdose.

GUAM:
In Barrigada, staff of the Guam National Guard wore purple to signify their support for overdose awareness

SOUTH AFRICA:
The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) of the South African Government held an IOAD event in partnership with the South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (SANCA) Limpopo at Mmakgabo Secondary School focused on empowering young people with knowledge and skills to manage and understand the risks of drug use.

NEW ZEALAND:
The NZ Drug Foundation released new data showing rising deaths and hospitalizations linked to stimulant use and the first fatalities due to nitazenes, detailed in the Drug Overdoses in Aotearoa 2025 report.



COMMUNITY AND PARTNER COLLABORATION

One of the guiding principles of IOAD is that only community-wide effort can end the overdose crisis. This is why we work hard to engage with partners and community members around the world as we build the campaign each year.

In 2025, we:

- consulted trusted partners in the development of a high-impact campaign theme
- collaborated with multiple organizations and groups on campaign plans and event ideas
- developed a new partner toolkit.

"MY HIGHLIGHT THIS YEAR WAS THE INTEREST SHOWN BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN PERSONALLY IMPACTED BY OVERDOSE."

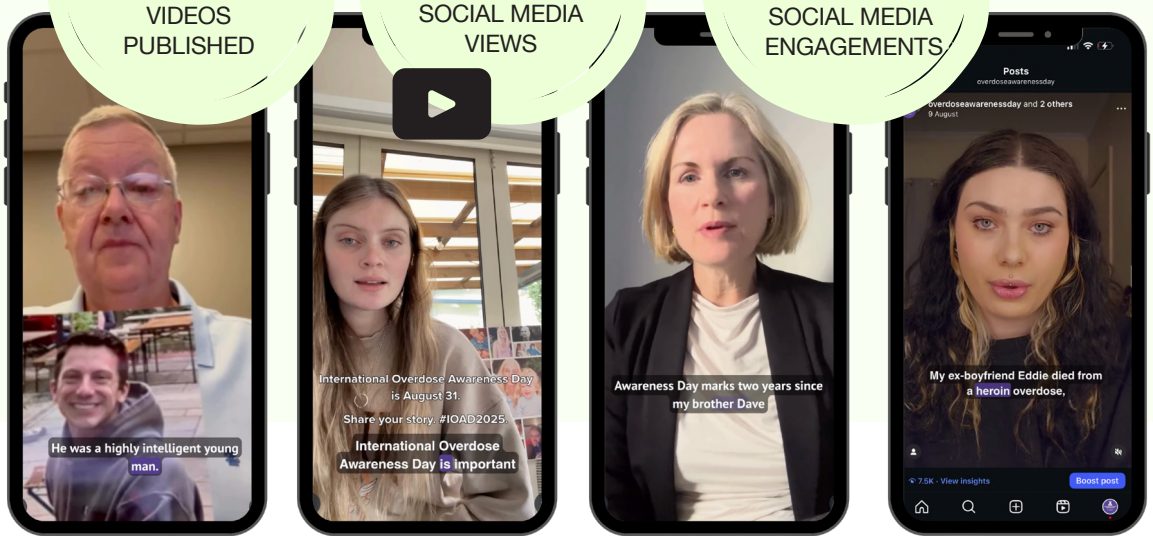
- 2025 Community Survey respondent

In 2025 we also invited the community to participate in a *Storytelling for Stigma Reduction* campaign, creating short-form videos for social media about overdose, stigma and the value of IOAD. We were overwhelmed by the community response and intend to continue this kind of storytelling into the future to support reaching a wider audience and strengthening awareness across communities.

14 VIDEOS PUBLISHED

45,000 SOCIAL MEDIA VIEWS

1,500 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENTS



WITH GRATITUDE

Speaking openly about overdose is still not easy. Stigma, shame and silence remain powerful barriers to finding solutions. Yet the IOAD community continues to show extraordinary courage, compassion, and solidarity year on year.

To the IOAD community: The remarkable achievements of IOAD 2025 are yours. You honor loved ones, share knowledge, and come together to demand change, refusing to be silenced or deterred.

From the thousands who took part in events to the hundreds who shared insights in our community survey, your voices shape this campaign and ensure it grows stronger each year.

This report is both a celebration of your achievements and a reminder of the work ahead. Thank you for standing with us, for one another, on the path to a future where no life is lost to overdose.

To our fiscal and in-kind partners — Camurus AB, Emergent BioSolutions and Google — and to everyone who donated or purchased merchandise from the IOAD website: thank you. A special thank you to our volunteer, Rick Skanron, whose support over the past few years has been invaluable.

Without your visionary commitment, we would not be able to continue to connect, heal and create positive change.



Image: Macksville Bridge lit up purple, NSW, Australia. Photo credit: Irene Abogado.



Image: Remembering those absent from family dinner. Coastal Recovery Community Center event, Maine, USA.

WE'RE REACHING A MILESTONE IN 2026

Next year marks 25 years since the first International Overdose Awareness Day.

We have seen enormous progress since IOAD began in 2001: what began as a small remembrance gathering in Australia is now a powerful campaign uniting communities in around 40 countries. But the need for change and action remains urgent — which is why IOAD continues to grow as a global movement.

The 25th anniversary is an important milestone in that journey. Together, let's make it a defining moment for this campaign, one that amplifies our collective voice and pushes decision-makers to act.

We are energized by the resilience and solidarity of this community, and we invite you to start planning now so that we can make IOAD 2026 a turning point in our work to transform remembrance into action and grief into progress. For those we have lost, and those we continue working hard to protect.

Image: Scottish Drugs Forum annual #StopTheDeaths Conference for IOAD 2025, Glasgow, UK.





Image (right): *Medicine Hat Drug Coalition event, Alberta, Canada. Photo credit: Kym Porter.*

Image (below): *11th Annual Overdose and Prevention Rally, Newark, Ohio, USA. Photo credit: Trish Perry.*





Image: *Falmouth Commission on Substance Use event, Massachusetts, USA. Photo credit: Rabbi Elias Lieberman*

SEE YOU IN 2026!

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