



Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Testimony in Support of L.D. 710, *An Act to Expand Access and Reduce Barriers to  
Access to Naloxone Hydrochloride and Other Opioid Overdose-reversing Medications*  
By Heide Lester on behalf of EqualityMaine

March 17, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Heide Lester, and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We strongly support the expansion of access to naloxone hydrochloride and other opioid overdose-reversing medications and the mitigation of barriers.

LGBTQ+ people have higher rates of substance use and substance use disorders compared to non-LGBTQ+ people: LGB adults are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual adults to experience a substance use disorder,<sup>1</sup> and transgender people are almost four times as likely as cisgender people to experience a substance use disorder.<sup>2</sup> Higher rates of substance use disorder are often exacerbated by social stigma, discrimination, and the pressures of minority stress. But, the increased availability of naloxone helps many people, including and especially vulnerable communities, and removing barriers to effective interventions and respecting the health and dignity of people who use drugs are essential components of a comprehensive strategy to tackle overdose rates.

Naloxone distribution programs are a key strategy for reducing overdose fatalities; with access to naloxone, lay responders, such as people who use opioids, their friends and family, and social service providers can prevent overdose death. Overdose education programs prepare lay responders to respond to overdose by providing education about risk factors for opioid overdose, signs of opioid overdose, naloxone administration, and aftercare procedures and can help improve readiness and confidence in responding to someone who may be experiencing an overdose. However, specialized training is not needed to use naloxone.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, stigmatizing beliefs about naloxone and the people who use it have proven to negatively impact training goals among naloxone training participants.<sup>4</sup> While people who use substances are

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<sup>1</sup> Bastian Rosner et al. "Substance Use among Sexual Minorities in the US – Linked to Inequalities and Unmet Need for Mental Health Treatment? Results from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)." *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, Pergamon, 17 Dec. 2020, sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022395620311316.

<sup>2</sup> Wanta, Jonathon W., et al. *Transgender Health*, Nov. 2019, liebertpub.com/doi/pdf/10.1089/trgh.2019.0029.

<sup>3</sup> "Guide to Hosting a Naloxone Demonstration." *National Institutes of Health*, U.S. DHHS, 23 Sept. 2024, nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/guide-to-hosting-a-naloxone-demonstration.

<sup>4</sup> Pasman, E., Nikolova, K., Victor, B. G., Agius, E., & Resko, S. M. "Perceived stigma toward naloxone among overdose education and naloxone distribution program participants: Implications for opioid overdose response." *Stigma and Health*, 2024, doi.org/10.1037/sah0000523

often subject to stigma, those who manage their use with harm reduction strategies are subject to additional layers of criticism and shame. And research suggests that individuals who receive greater discrimination may be less likely to seek out or carry naloxone, which then yields an additional obstacle in the quest to reduce overdose fatalities.

Vending machines stocked with naloxone increase access to the overdose-reversing drug, help alleviate the barriers of accessing a life-saving medication, and reduce stigma related to substance use disorder. By making naloxone readily available and removing any barriers to accessing it, such as training requirements, we can keep people safer and alive longer. Between January and December 2024, Maine saw 490 confirmed and suspected fatal drug overdoses, compared with 2023's 606 deaths. That is the largest year-over-year decline since 2023, when fatal overdoses fell 16% from the year prior, which was itself the largest decline since 2018.<sup>5</sup> We urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on L.D. 710 to continue Maine's trend of falling fatal overdose statistics.

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

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<sup>5</sup> Burns, C. "Maine Saw a 19 Percent Drop in Overdose Deaths Last Year." *Bangor Daily News*, 4 Feb. 2025, [bangordailynews.com/2025/02/04/state/state-health/maine-overdose-deaths-preliminary-2024-report/](https://bangordailynews.com/2025/02/04/state/state-health/maine-overdose-deaths-preliminary-2024-report/).