

<b>Date:</b>	Wednesday, June 18, 2025	<b>Type:</b>	In-person Chrysalis Center, Hartford
<b>Start Time:</b>	12:45 p.m.	<b>End Time:</b>	2:15 p.m.
<b>Leaders</b>	Mitchell Namias (CT DPH Resource Liaison)		
<b>Participants:</b>		<b>Next Meeting:</b>	July 16, 2025

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mitchell Namias opened the meeting by welcoming all participants and facilitating introductions.

### APPROVE MAY MEETING SUMMARY

The group conducted a brief review of the May meeting summary, which was subsequently approved

### REGIONAL FORUM PRESENTATION: CONNECTICUT HARM REDUCTION ALLIANCE (CTHRA) –STRATEGIES & INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Mitchell reminded the group that The Needs Assessment Projects (NAP) Committee is inviting selected agencies to participate in regional forums aimed to highlight their agencies work and to gather field-based insights that will inform the next Integrated HIV Prevention and Care Plan for 2027–2031, including the Statewide Coordinated Statement of Need (SCSN). Mitchell clarified this is not a monitoring or funder-directed review; rather, this is an opportunity to showcase their agency’s services, share successes and innovations, and identify challenges and gaps in a supportive, non-critical setting. He thanked CTHRA for agreeing to be the first agency/organization to give this presentation.

#### Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance (CTHRA)

Ben Grippo and Michael Judd from Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance (CTHRA), based in Hartford, provided an overview of CTHRA’s mission, services, impact, and operational challenges in delivering harm reduction services statewide.

CTHRA operates as a non-clinical, point-of-care organization serving individuals who use drugs, with a focus on those who are unhoused or experiencing other structural vulnerabilities. As the largest naloxone provider in Connecticut, CTHRA accounts for 54% of the state’s Narcan distribution and receives approximately 69% of its funding from federal sources. To promote dignity and reduce stigma, the organization intentionally refers to its clients as “participants,” reflecting a person-centered, nonjudgmental approach to care.

Key services offered by CTHRA include:

- A robust syringe services program (SSP) which includes mobile outreach to various locations across the state.

- Distribution of sterile syringes, safe sex kits, wound care supplies, drug use safety kits, tarps, and tents for participants experiencing homelessness.
- A drug-checking program based at their Albany Avenue drop-in center, where participants can submit substances for analysis using a specialized microscope to detect contaminants.
- A mobile RV unit staffed by registered nurses (RNs), which provides health services directly in the field (RV even has showers).
- HIV prevention services, including offering PrEP and PEP to all individuals who are tested.
- Partnerships with housing organizations like Journey Home to support shelter placements for people in encampments.
- Ongoing collaboration with law enforcement, schools, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

CTHRA has experienced significant growth, now employing 57 staff, many of whom have lived experience with substance use and strong ties to the communities they serve. The organization recently established a Human Resources department to accommodate its statewide expansion. It has also absorbed Sex Workers Anonymous (SWAN), extending its supportive services to sex workers throughout Connecticut.

Despite its achievements, CTHRA continues to navigate several complex challenges:

- Barriers to follow-up care due to participants lacking stable housing, legal identification, or citizenship documentation.
- Emerging drug trends, such as xylazine and medetomidine, that contribute to severe health complications and are not reversible with naloxone.
- Limited testing capacity, particularly for hepatitis C, and difficulty prioritizing routine testing among participants.
- Mental health challenges and high rates of distrust toward the healthcare system among the populations served.
- Staff burnout, prompting internal conversations around workforce resilience, training needs (Motivational Interviewing), and the potential development of a street medicine team.

Looking ahead, CTHRA is actively pursuing several strategic priorities:

- Expanding partnerships to enhance HIV prevention and harm reduction outreach.
- Exploring Medicaid (HUSKY) billing to build a more sustainable funding model.
- Hiring clinical staff or integrating medical services into mobile operations for more immediate care.
- Planning for future safe injection sites, should legal and policy landscapes shift in support of such initiatives.
- Maintaining low barrier access to services while strengthening coordination with clinical and syndemic partners.

Ben concluded the presentation stating that CTHRA is grounded in trust based, participant centered outreach. As the organization evolves, they continue to balance service expansion with the realities of engaging hard to reach populations, always striving to meet people where they are.

### MEETING CLOSE

Mitchell reminded the group that there is still an opening for the NAP Community Co-chair leadership position. If anyone is interested in applying, please visit <https://www.cthivplanning.org/>

The next meeting will be in-person on July 16<sup>th</sup> via Zoom.

### ATTENDANCE

Attendance records are kept on file with the CHPC support staff.

### ADJOURN

The committee meeting ended at 2:15 a.m.

DRAFT