



# Perceptions of opioid-related stigma decreased in communities that received the **Communities that HEAL** intervention

## The Problem ▶

Negative ideas about people who use opioids and receive medical treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD) get in the way of efforts to prevent overdose and save lives. In communities where opioid-related stigma is common, people who use drugs have less access to addiction treatment services.

## The Goal ▶

Our research team was interested in whether community stigma toward people who use drugs changed in the communities that received the [Communities that HEAL](#) (CTH) intervention.

## What We Did ▶

We surveyed hundreds of community leaders championing opioid overdose reduction efforts in 66 communities selected as part of the [HEALing Communities Study](#). We asked them to report levels of community stigma at three different times during the study period.

## What We Learned ▶

Leaders in CTH intervention communities reported greater reductions in stigma toward people receiving treatment for OUD and medications to treat people with OUD than leaders in communities that did not receive the intervention.

CTH intervention communities showed a  
**3-percentage point**  
decrease in community stigma.

### Challenging stigma: What do people in your community think?

*Most people in my community...*

... **think less of a person** who has been in treatment for OUD.

... believe that medications for OUD are just replacement drugs and **not real treatment**.

... believe that if you provide naloxone to reverse an overdose to someone that it **will encourage them to continue** using opioids in the future.

## Why It Matters ▶

Local leaders in CTH intervention communities were more likely to report reductions in community stigma than local leaders in communities that had not yet received the CTH intervention. Involving community members in choosing, planning, and taking part in overdose reduction interventions can help reduce community stigma.

## What Now? ▶

CTH intervention strategies, especially those that engage community members and distribute anti-stigma messages, may be effective in helping your community decrease negative ideas about people who are receiving medicine to treat opioid addiction. Eliminating stigma is necessary to make sure people with OUD can get the medical help they need.

NIH  
**HEAL**  
INITIATIVE

HEALing  
Communities  
Study

#healtogether

This is a summary of scientific research published in *The Lancet Regional Health Americas* by Davis et al. (2024): [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanam/article/PIIS2667-193X\(24\)00037-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanam/article/PIIS2667-193X(24)00037-1/fulltext)