

Anyone Can Make The Difference. Anyone.

Three numbers every congregation member should know:

- 911: Medical emergencies and overdose
- 988: Mental health or substance use crisis (call or text, free, 24/7) | 988lifeline.org
- 1-800-662-4357: Free, confidential treatment referrals (SAMHSA, 24/7)

**Faith-Based Organization Leader Guide
Understanding Substance Use Disorder**

Why Faith Communities Matter

Faith-based organizations have a long history of supporting people in need. They are often the first place people turn when facing life challenges, for themselves or for family members.

Research confirms what many faith leaders already know: spirituality and community connection protect against substance misuse. A 2026 study in JAMA Psychiatry found that people who regularly participate in **spiritual communities have an 18% lower risk of harmful alcohol and drug use**. Faith communities in Pennsylvania are not bystanders to this crisis. They are an active part of the solution.

Pennsylvania context: The 2025 Pennsylvania Youth Survey found that Pennsylvania youth show stronger-than-average levels of two key protective factors: religiosity (the degree to which young people view religion as important in their lives and regularly participate in religious activities) and **belief in the moral order** (a sense that there are clear rules about right and wrong and that people generally follow them). Both are associated with lower risk of substance misuse. Faith communities build these protective factors every week. See the full survey at pays.pa.gov.

The Crisis in Pennsylvania

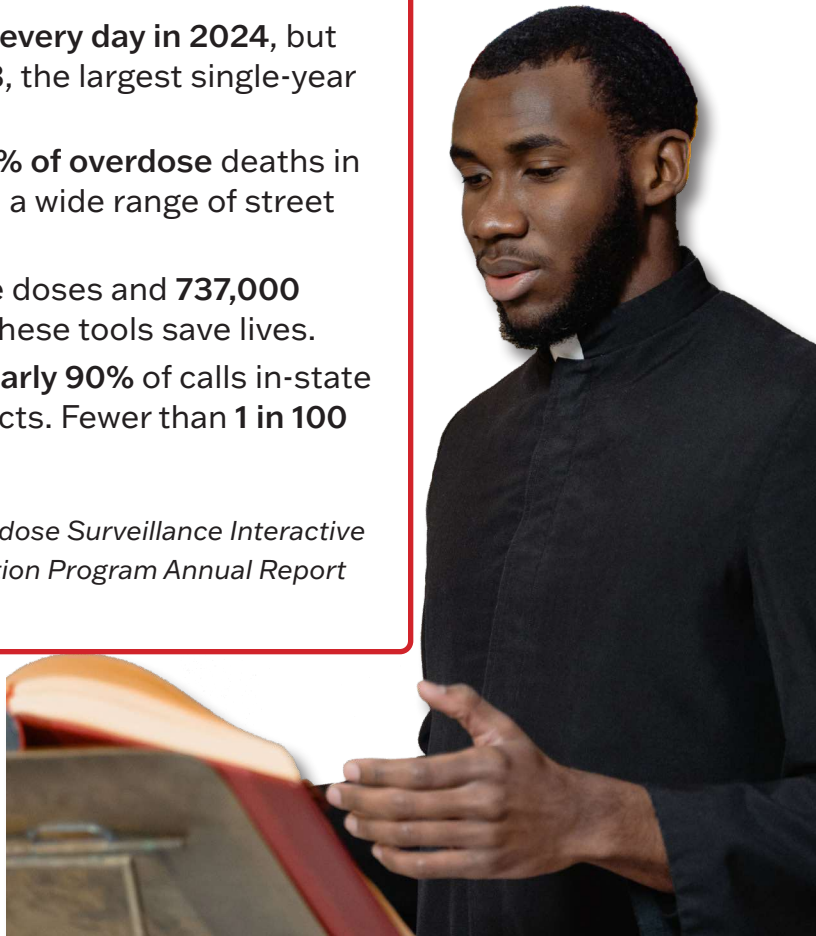
Substance use disorder touches every community in this state, including yours. Here is what the current data shows:

Pennsylvania at a glance (2024-2025)

- About **9 Pennsylvanians died by overdose every day in 2024**, but overdose deaths **fell nearly 30%** from 2023, the largest single-year decline on record.
- **Fentanyl was involved in approximately 61% of overdose deaths in 2024** (preliminary data). It is now present in a wide range of street drugs, often without the user's knowledge.
- DDAP distributed about **800,000 naloxone doses** and **737,000 fentanyl and xylazine test strips** in 2025. These tools save lives.
- Pennsylvania's **988 crisis line answered nearly 90%** of calls in-state in 2025. Counselors resolved **93%** of contacts. Fewer than **1 in 100** involved law enforcement.

Sources: PA Department of Health / ODSMP Drug Overdose Surveillance Interactive Data Report (2024 preliminary); DDAP Overdose Prevention Program Annual Report FFY 2024-25; PA DHS OMHSAS 988 data (2025).

The progress is real. So is the need. Faith communities are part of why Pennsylvania is turning the corner.



If someone is in Crisis, Act Now:



**CALL
911**

Call 911 for a medical emergency or overdose. Stay with the person until help arrives.



**CALL
988**

Call or text 988 for mental health or substance use crisis (free, confidential, 24/7). 988lifeline.org



Use naloxone (Narcan) if available. It reverses opioid overdose and is safe to use when in doubt.

Pennsylvania's Good Samaritan Law (Act 139), also known as David's Law, offers criminal and civil protections to those who call 911 for an overdose. Conditions apply.

Learn more: pa.gov/agencies/ddap/overdose/opioid-overdose

Tips For Success

- Naloxone (Narcan) is now available over the counter at most Pennsylvania pharmacies without a prescription. **No doctor's visit needed.**
- Consider keeping naloxone in your building and making sure key members know how to use it. **It is safe, simple, and can save a life.**
- Your county SCA (see next page) and many local pharmacies may offer **free naloxone and training.**
- To find free naloxone near you or get training resources, visit <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/ddap/overdose/naloxone>.



Who to Call in Pennsylvania

Two agencies are your starting point for any substance use question in Pennsylvania:

Your county Single County Authority (SCA)

Every Pennsylvania county has an SCA, a designated local agency that oversees substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery services. They fund programs, connect people to treatment, and support community organizations like yours.

Find your county SCA: pa.gov/agencies/ddap/treatment-and-support/county-drug-and-alcohol-offices

SCA staff can provide speakers, training, free naloxone, data for presentations, and help you connect to local coalitions. They want faith partners. Call them.

Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP)

DDAP is the cabinet-level state agency responsible for all programs related to substance use education, prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery in Pennsylvania. They fund and oversee the SCA network and publish the data and resources referenced throughout this guide.

PA Get Help Now Hotline: **1-800-662-4357**

Understanding Addiction

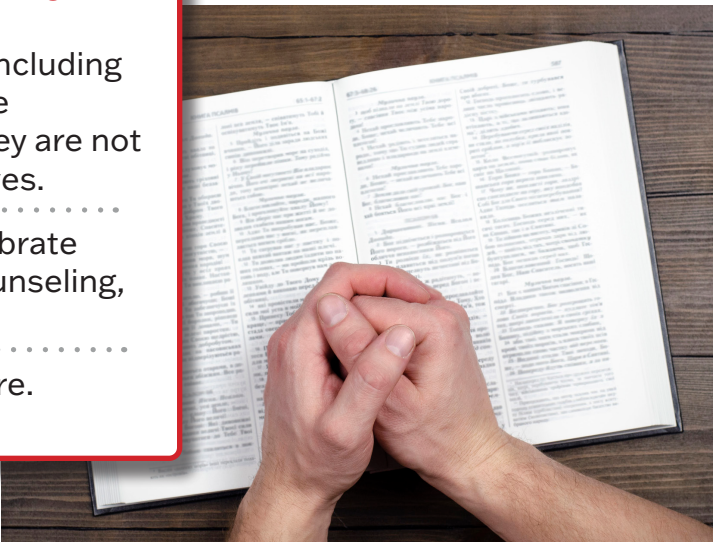
Addiction, clinically called Substance Use Disorder (SUD), is a treatable, chronic medical disease, not a moral failure or lack of willpower. It involves complex interactions among brain chemistry, genetics, environment, and life experiences. Recovery is possible at every stage.

Language matters. Saying 'person with a substance use disorder' instead of 'addict' or 'junkie' reduces shame and reflects medical reality. Faith communities that change their language help change culture.

No street drug is safe to assume fentanyl-free. Fentanyl is now present in a wide range of street drugs (counterfeit pills, cocaine, methamphetamine), often without the user's knowledge. Preliminary 2024 data from the Pennsylvania Department of Health shows fentanyl was involved in approximately 61% of overdose deaths in the state.

Three Things Every Faith Leader Should Know:

1. Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), including buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone, are evidence-based, FDA-approved treatments. They are not 'substituting one drug for another.' They save lives.
.....
2. There are many paths to recovery. AA, NA, Celebrate Recovery, SMART Recovery, peer coaching, counseling, and treatment are all valid paths.
.....
3. Recovery is often not linear. Relapse is not failure. Sustained support matters.



What to Say and What to Avoid

Your first response when someone shares a struggle with substance use can open a door or close it. You don't need clinical training. You need compassion and a willingness to listen.

Instead of...	Try saying...
"Why don't you just stop?"	"I'm glad you trusted me enough to tell me. Let's talk about how we can help."
"You just need more willpower."	"Substance use disorder is a medical condition, and recovery is possible with the right support."
"You need more faith."	"Faith can be a powerful source of strength, and professional treatment can be an important part of healing too."
"You brought this on yourself."	"I'm sorry you're going through this. You don't have to face it alone."
"You have to hit rock bottom first."	"Help is available now. People can begin recovery at any stage."
"I won't tell anyone."	"I'll respect your privacy whenever possible. If I believe someone is in immediate danger, I'll help connect you with emergency services."
"I'll fix this for you."	"I'll walk alongside you and help connect you with people who have the training and resources to help."
"You're an addict."	"You're a person facing a substance use disorder, and your life has value beyond this struggle."

Remember:

- Your role is not to diagnose or treat. Listen without judgment, offer hope, and connect people to appropriate help.
- You don't need all the answers. A caring conversation may be the first step someone takes toward recovery.
- When someone says yes to help, don't hand them a number and walk away. Sit with them. Make the call together. Offer to drive. Show up the next day.

Five Things Your Congregation Can Do:

No clinical training required. Start with whatever fits your congregation right now.

1

Support Prevention in Your Community

Helping someone after addiction takes hold is vital, but preventing it from starting is just as important. Faith communities build the protective factors that prevention science says matter most: caring relationships, belonging, clear expectations, and hope.

- **Know the risk and protective factors.** When young people lack strong family bonds and community connection, their risk of substance misuse rises. Learn what works and what doesn't at paprevention.org/special-initiatives/what-works-in-prevention/
- **Host or support an evidence-based prevention program.** Programs like Strengthening Families and Life Skills Training have been rigorously tested and proven to reduce substance use among youth. Your county SCA can recommend programs that fit your congregation. epis.psu.edu/programs
- **Use the Prevention Learning Portal.** Pennsylvania's free Prevention Learning Portal, developed by EPIS at Penn State, offers online courses for anyone who wants to understand prevention science. plp.psu.edu
- **Equip parents and caregivers.** PA Start's family toolkits offer ready-to-use resources for talking with young people about substance use. pastart.org/families-communities/family-toolkits/
- **Partner with your county SCA on prevention programming.** SCAs fund evidence-based prevention programs and are actively looking for community settings to host them. pa.gov/agencies/ddap/treatment-and-support/county-drug-and-alcohol-offices

2

Get Equipped

- **Get naloxone and learn to use it.** Order free naloxone through your county SCA or pick it up at most pharmacies. Consider a one-hour training for your congregation. ddap.pa.gov
- **Put 988 everywhere.** Bulletins, bulletin boards, social media, and the back of every pew. Normalize it like a poison control number.
- **Host a Mental Health First Aid training.** An 8-hour, evidence-based training that prepares anyone to recognize and respond to mental health and substance use crises. mentalhealthfirstaid.org
- **Talk about it.** Sermon series, adult education, small groups. Normalizing the conversation reduces the isolation that drives addiction. Stigma is not a spiritual virtue.

3

Support People, Families, and Recovery

- **Meet practical needs.** Food, transportation, childcare, utility assistance: these are barriers to treatment and recovery that congregations can help remove.
- **Host a support group.** Offer your space for AA, NA, Al-Anon, Celebrate Recovery, SMART Recovery, or other groups.
- **Offer a warm hand-off.** When someone is ready for help, don't hand them a number and walk away. Sit with them while they call. Drive them to the appointment. Follow up the next day.
- **Celebrate recovery.** Publicly honoring milestones (anniversaries, treatment completions) changes a congregation's culture around addiction.

4

Support Children and Families

- **Mentor.** Consistent, caring adult relationships are among the most powerful protective factors for children affected by household substance use.
- **Support grandparents raising grandchildren.** These families face unique financial, legal, and emotional burdens with limited formal support.
- **Give parents tools for talking with teens.** PA Start's family toolkits offer ready-to-use resources for conversations about substance use. pastart.org/families-communities/family-toolkits/

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Connect with Your Community

- **Find your county SCA.** They can connect you to coalitions, prevention programs, training, and free naloxone. pa.gov/agencies/ddap/treatment-and-support/county-drug-and-alcohol-offices
- **Host a Prescription Drug Take Back Day.** Partner with a local pharmacy and law enforcement. TakeBackDay.DEA.gov
- **Join the PA Faith Community Collaborative.** A statewide network of faith and coalition leaders. overdosefreepa.org

Fast Facts

Prevention works. The evidence is clear:

1. Evidence-based prevention programs reduce youth substance use by **20-40%** in evaluated studies.
2. Every **\$1** invested in prevention saves **\$4-\$10** in later treatment costs.
3. Protective factors (caring adults, community belonging, clear expectations) are things faith communities provide every week.
4. EPIS at Penn State supports 20 proven programs across Pennsylvania and offers **free technical assistance**: epis.psu.edu/programs

Key Resources

In a Crisis: Start Here

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 | 988lifeline.org

Medical Emergency / Overdose

Call 911

SAMHSA National Helpline

1-800-662-4357 (24/7, free)

PA Get Help Now

1-800-662-4357 | ddap.pa.gov

Find Local Help

Find your county SCA

pa.gov/agencies/ddap/...county-drug-and-alcohol-offices

Naloxone info & training

ddap.pa.gov | nextdistro.org

National Treatment Locator

findtreatment.gov

Caregiver resources (PA)

caregiverconnectionpa.org

Build Your Congregation's Capacity

Mental Health First Aid

mentalhealthfirstaid.org

ACEs / Child Trauma (SAMHSA)

samhsa.gov/mental-health/trauma-violence/child-trauma

PA Start Family Toolkits

pastart.org/families-communities/family-toolkits/

Prescription Drug Take Back

TakeBackDay.DEA.gov

PA Faith Community Collaborative

overdosefreepa.org

Prevention Resources

Prevention Learning Portal (PA)

plp.psu.edu

DDAP Prevention Resources

pa.gov/agencies/ddap/substance-use-prevention

EPIS: Evidence-based programs

epis.psu.edu/programs

DDAP County Drug & Alcohol Offices

pa.gov/agencies/ddap/...county-drug-and-alcohol-offices

Recovery Support Groups

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

aa.org

Celebrate Recovery

celebraterecovery.com

Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

na.org

JACS (Jewish)

jbfcs.org/jacs

Al-Anon (for families)

al-anon.org

SMART Recovery

smartrecovery.org

Nar-Anon (for families)

nar-anon.org

Millati Islami (Muslim)

millatiislami.org

Teen & Youth Resources

NIDA for Teens

nida.nih.gov/research-topics/teens

Talk. They Hear You. (SAMHSA)

samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you



PASTart.org