

## INTERNATIONAL OVERDOSE AWARENESS DAY

# A VISION TO END THE GLOBAL OVERDOSE CRISIS

### PARTNERS' REPORT 2020



# International Overdose Awareness Day

A Penington Institute initiative

95 Drummond Street Carlton VIC 3053 Australia

[www.overdoseday.com](http://www.overdoseday.com)

 InternationalOverdoseAwarenessDay

 OverdoseDay

 OverdoseAwarenessDay

 Overdose Tribute Page

December 2020



Cover photograph: a collage of International Overdose Awareness Day event photos

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# FOREWORD



Fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, the overdose crisis has grown into a more complicated and deadlier epidemic.

COVID-19 has overwhelmed health systems, decreased the tolerance of people who use drugs, and disrupted services and the drug supply.

These impacts are all too often ignored by policy makers, so it is up to advocates to continue calling for a better response.

International Overdose Awareness Day works to do just this.

Each year, people around the world gather at IOAD events to call for an end to the overdose crisis, remember those who have died without stigma and acknowledge the grief of the family and friends left behind.

This year, of course, many of those physical events have not been possible.

But that has not diminished the spirit or the work of IOAD. Instead, the global community has adapted with the changing times and moved to provide more digital events and campaign support than ever before, and seen one of the most successful years since this campaign first began.

In 2020, 602 registered IOAD events were held in 37 countries. While it is a slight reduction in the number that has steadily increased over the years, it represents an amazing accomplishment.

Here at Penington Institute, our mission is to support that purpose and community. We are motivated by the injustice of our loved ones dying of overdose. We work with people at the coalface to connect lived experience and research to improve community safety in relation to drugs.

The Partners' Report is the definitive story of the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign, capturing its successes, impacts, and the strength of the passionate community which makes it possible.

It focuses on the tangible changes this year's campaign was able to deliver and measures the personal difference this event has made through the Partner's Report survey. More than 200 members of the IOAD community told us about their experiences and how they can be better supported to make change.

There are thousands of other people involved with the campaign. They register and hold events, call for evidence-based drug policies to end the overdose crisis, raise money, order and distribute merchandise, send and share tributes to their lost loved ones and so much else besides.

Every single person involved deserves to feel very proud of the difference they are making.

I am proud to present this year's International Overdose Awareness Day Partners' Report. More than ever, it is dedicated to our extraordinary partners around the world. I look forward to working with you all again next year – and thank you for your continued support.

As the crisis continues to grow, so too must our response.

## **John Ryan**

Penington Institute CEO  
and Convenor of International  
Overdose Awareness Day

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year's International Overdose Awareness Day has seen the movement continue despite the disruptive effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report explores the outcomes, impact, and success of IOAD, studies the events and their attendees, and examines how COVID-19 impacted IOAD and how event organisers and participants responded.

It also tells the stories of some of those who chose to be involved.

The findings in the Partners' Report are based principally on data gathered from the IOAD 2020 Partners' Survey, which had 204 respondents.

This is a global sample representative of this year's 602 registered events in 37 countries.

The Survey was created and shared with our IOAD Partners on the 15th of September and closed on the 8th of October.

Many of the respondents noted that COVID-19 had made it difficult to hold physical events because of restrictions in their areas.

In anticipation of disruptions to physical events, Penington Institute, the conveners of the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign, produced a Digital Event Guide, Social Media Kit, and other digital advocacy resources.

This support enabled the digital campaign to go from strength to strength.

From the beginning of July to the end of September, there was a more than 25 per cent increase in visits to the [International Overdose Awareness Day website](#) compared to the same time in 2019.

Visitors over this time downloaded IOAD resources to help with their event planning – such as posters, fact sheets, the digital event guide and social media kit – more than 87,000 times. This is an increase of approximately 12,000 on the resource downloads in 2019.

At the time of writing, the [International Overdose Awareness Day Facebook page](#) has more than 43,300 subscribers, 4,900 Twitter followers, and 3,150 Instagram followers.

The recently launched [Overdose Tribute page](#), where people can submit photos and tributes to their lost loved ones, has more than 700 followers.

We are deeply grateful to the 204 people who took the time to share their honest thoughts with us.

Those experiences and insights will help to improve the quality, reach and impact of the campaign in future.

The Report ends with a reflection on the 2020 campaign and a look ahead to International Overdose Awareness Day 2021, which will mark 20 years since the event began.

## Kenyan Aids NGOs Consortium (East Africa)

To mark International Overdose Awareness Day, the Kenyan Aids NGOs Consortium (KANCO) hosted a webinar that drew expert panellists from across the globe to share and deliberate on the way forward for overdose under the theme 'Overdose: The Pandemic within a Pandemic'.

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The webinar targeted the East African region of community activists, people who use drugs, policy makers, and other stakeholders. KANCO also organised a PWID community feedback and dialogue webinar forum, as a follow-up event for the main webinar above to discuss overdose matters and decide on the way forward.

### Activity Details

The webinars focused on Alcohol and Opioid Overdose Management and Naloxone, sharing practical information as well as discussing the need for policies to enhance the availability of overdose prevention antidotes such as naloxone. There were six panelist for the webinars, including:

- Hon. Gathoni Wamuchomba, Member of Parliament in Kiambu County;
- Dr. Michael Katende, East Africa Community Secretariat;
- Ms. Helgar Musyoki, Head Prevention Unit, Ministry of Health, National AIDS/STI Control Program;
- Mr. John Kimani, Kenya Network of People who use Drugs (KeNPUD);
- Mr. John Ryan, Convener, International Overdose Awareness Day; and
- Mr. Allan Ragi, Executive Director, KANCO.

All panelists made 10-minute presentations which would be followed by interactive Q&A session with webinar attendees.

### Outcomes

The Hon. Gathoni Wamuchomba, Member of Parliament, Kiambu County and also the founder of the Mamacare Initiative that offers alcohol and drug use treatment and rehabilitation services in Kiambu County, observed that "Overdose is a scary word that is often associated with death, yet denial of the alcohol and drug use problem remains rife from both the community and the leadership, impeding the right responses."

Mr. John Kimani, Director of KeNPUD, shared the experiences of communities in accessing naloxone saying, "Naloxone should be made available within the reach of PWUDs, be supplied with reasonable durability to help curb overdose related mortalities. We also need to be trained on the use of naloxone, to help us save our brothers and sisters."

Helgar Musyoki noted that naloxone is still banned for community distribution under current public health laws. She recommended the need to review the laws and regulations consultatively with the stakeholders, engage Members of Parliament and the judiciary to fast track review of laws to support harm reduction including Overdose Management and procurement of naloxone spray as well as engagement with East Africa Community (EAC) to instigate further harm reduction interventions, including pooled procurements for some commodities such as naloxone.

Dr. Michael Katende, EAC Secretariat, said that the regional policy gives clear high-level guidance on managing harm reduction, however noting that being a new policy it needs support for adoption and implementation at all levels. He called on the need for continued advocacy for adoption and implementation of the regional policy by the Partner States and building partnerships with the EAC Secretariat for continued monitoring of illicit alcohol, drugs and other substances.

At the second webinar, PWID communities raised concerns over the general shortage of naloxone and the criminalisation of its possession by the community, saying it creates pockets of missed opportunities to save lives.

“We have seen many deaths that we could have prevented and it’s really scary”, a community member said. The communities also shared that overdose is more rampant among men who use drugs compared

to women, most of them being on medication-assisted therapy but also using other drugs and substances. They pointed to the need for continued advocacy to ensure that naloxone is provided to these cohorts. They also asked the government to decriminalise the possession of naloxone by community members, asking that instead members should be trained on how to administer it.

## Free Webinar

# Overdose: The Pandemic within a Pandemic









**Moderator: Sylvia Ayon, Key Populations Programs Manager**



 <b>Allan Ragi, Executive Director, KANCO</b>	 <b>Hon. Wamuchomba, MamaCare, Kiambu County</b>	 <b>Dr. Michael J. Katende, East Africa Community Secretariat</b>
 <b>John Ryan, Convenor, International Overdose Awareness Day</b>	 <b>Helgar Musyoki, NASCOP, Ministry of Health</b>	 <b>John Kimani, Executive Director, KENPUD</b>

**Date: 31st August 2020; Time 10.00AM-11.30 AM**

**Register here <https://bit.ly/2XA6WIP>**

## Number of events and participating countries

While 2020 saw a decline in the number of registered events (from 874 last year), the final tally of 602 registered events is an impressive achievement, made possible by the commitment of the global IOAD community despite the ongoing effects of COVID-19.

The pandemic made it impossible to hold physical events in many parts of the world.

The global community responded by holding in-person events, turning to online events where required, and engaging with the campaign more than ever on social media.

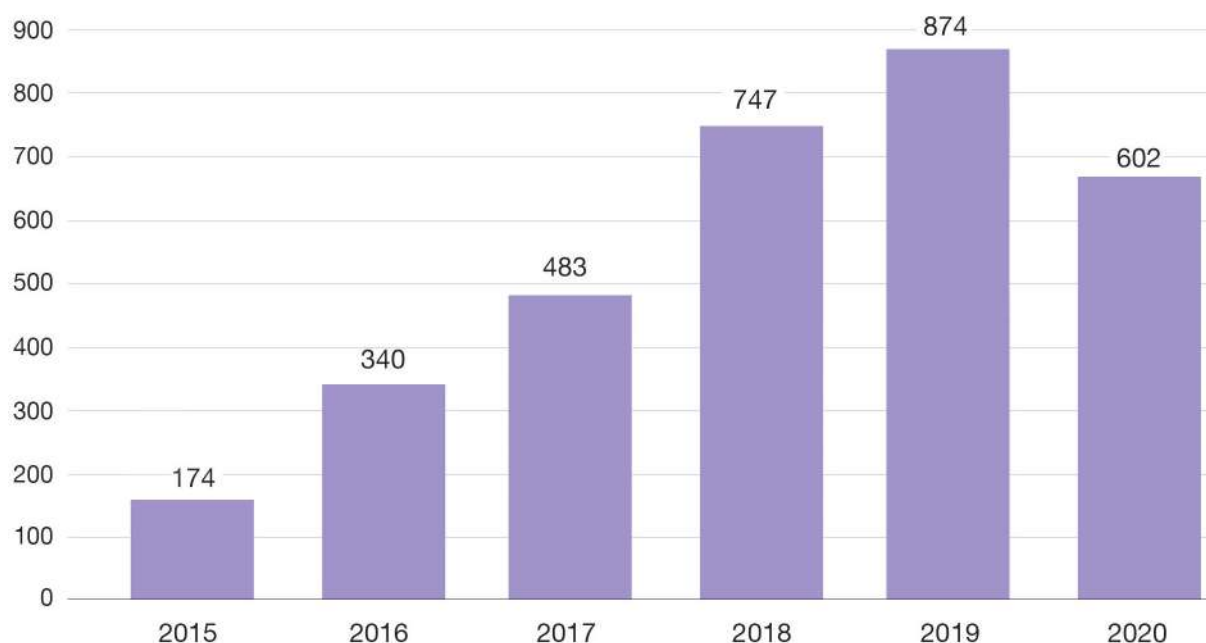
International Overdose Awareness Day continues to maintain a strong presence in dozens of countries around the world.

In 2020, events were held in 37 nations, just two fewer than the record set in 2019.

Sustaining such a high number of participating countries provides a strong foundation to continue raising awareness of overdose around the world and the need for evidence-based policies to reduce its tragic toll.

### Number of registered events

(Figure 1)



“ We found this year to be the most well attended event we have had since starting 4 years ago. We think, given all the traumatic things happening in the world right now, people needed the space to heal more than ever. ”

– Lauren

Beneath the surface, there are important differences between the countries which saw registered events in 2020 compared with the previous year.

There were IOAD events held in Liberia, Mauritius, the Netherlands and Uganda which was not the case in either 2019 or 2018.

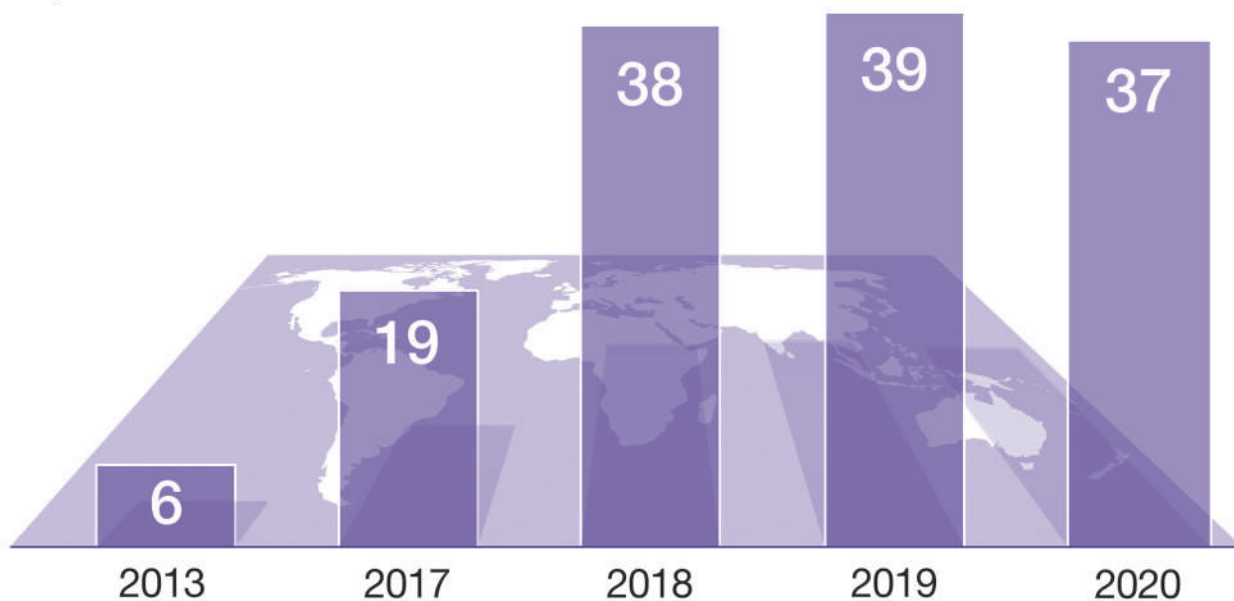
Mexico, Serbia and Tanzania held registered events in 2020 having held events in 2019.

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of local organisers in those countries and express our gratitude to advocates and change-makers in these countries.

We would also like to acknowledge countries which have had a strong and sustained IOAD community for many years, including Australia (where International Overdose Awareness Day was first observed), Canada, Denmark, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Nigeria, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

### Total number of IOAD participating countries

(Figure 2)



“ After losing my 17-year-old son to an accidental overdose, I began researching overdose signs and symptoms. I came across IOAD. Fantastic website. I learned so much. I was clueless that my son was overdosing and I did all the wrong things. I made it my mission to educate others to the signs and symptoms of overdose. I was sad to learn there was not any 2020 events anywhere near my county. With help of the IOAD website, I organized my county's first IOAD event. ”

– Ida

Our thoughts are with the communities around the world which are still battling the COVID-19 pandemic – which has greatly intensified the overdose crisis.

We are extremely grateful to every person who took the time to organise, register and hold an International Overdose Awareness Day event in 2020.

However, we also recognise the urgent need to expand the reach of the campaign. There are too many countries grappling with their own overdose crisis which, to date, have not been adequately represented by the campaign.

In every country, drug use issues play out behind a veil of profound shame and stigma.

However, in many countries, especially non-Western ones, advocates for evidence-based drug policies carry out their vital work of keeping people safe and healthy in full knowledge that they are breaking the law.

It is more important than ever to activate the communities in the world's developing nations – who are often fighting against restrictive legal regimes, resourcing shortfalls, and incomplete or inadequate data.

The lives of so many people depend on it.



*“ Thank you for keeping this going and advocating for change. I came across your website when googling ideas for how to hold a community event for overdose and because of your website, I was inspired to bring an event like the ones I saw on your page to our small town. I am grateful to be a part of this movement. ”*

– Danielle



## Musicians for Overdose Prevention online concert

**Musicians for Overdose Prevention and National Harm Reduction Coalition created a day-long series of online music shows for International Overdose Awareness Day. The aim was to raise awareness of the overdose crisis in a way that was entertaining and shareable over social media.**

25 bands, musicians, singer songwriters, DJs played 15-minute sets from noon to 10pm. These were pre-recorded and shared on the National Harm Reduction Coalition Facebook page, Musicians for Overdose Prevention Facebook page, and on YouTube.

There were over 5,000 views of the livestream on the day. Bands like Rich Girls, Default American, Tucker Riggelman and the Cheap Dates all performed.

As well as having a significant audience for the music series, this series on International Overdose Awareness Day also helped to connect the underground music scene with harm reduction.

Overdose has always been disempowering for the music industry, and this series is a way for musicians and bands to learn about harm reduction and naloxone and empower themselves with this knowledge and solutions.



Bonny Dagger



Tucker Riggelman and the Cheap Dates



Rich Girls

## Outcomes and Impact

Our success in growing International Overdose Awareness Day is measured mostly by the number of registered events which take place every year.

Every event, no matter its purpose, is important.

However, the true purpose of this work is to help implement real drug policies that save lives and keep people safe.

As in previous years, International Overdose Awareness Day 2020 saw several meaningful outcomes. The actual difference and the true success of this work includes:

- South Africa's National Department of Social Development formally recognising International Overdose Awareness Day and naming the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs a strategic partner.
- The Kenyan AIDS NGO Consortium (KANCO) organising a webinar ("Overdose: The Pandemic Within a Pandemic") bringing together public health leaders to discuss strengthening overdose prevention activities across East Africa.
- The Chicago-based West Side Heroin/Opioid Task Force hosting a press conference attended by the local representative La Shawn K. Ford and the Secretary of the Illinois Department of Human Services. The Secretary pledged greater funding to alleviate racial disparities in overdose and drug harms, and shortly after the State of Illinois was awarded a US\$36 million federal grant by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to combat opioid addiction through hospitals, health centres and community programs.
- The leader of the Irish Opposition, Mary Lou McDonald discussing an International Overdose Awareness Day event held by [SAOL](#) Project in the Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament).
- The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) launching a new set of resources developed under the agency's harm reduction initiative and designed to improve understanding of drug overdoses and responses to them in Europe.
- The Alliance for Better Communities in New York meeting with their incumbent assemblyman as well as his challenger to discuss evidence-based programs and interventions as well as greater outreach regarding syringe exchange and physician education regarding medication-assisted therapies and programs.



- Recovery Force Atlantic City adopting a [Recovery Bill of Rights](#).
- Overdose prevention and response training and the distribution of naloxone in many jurisdictions.
- Mayoral Proclamations across North America.

Much of the impact IOAD makes is personal, and harder to quantify.

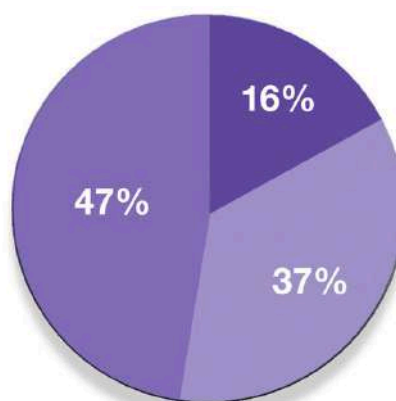
While many of the impacts of this campaign can be hard to measure, the Partners' Survey is an attempt to understand them.

As part of this survey, 204 people were asked if they had seen, or expected to see, public action or meaningful change occur as a result of their event.

16.6 per cent of respondents said that they had already seen or expected to see public action taken as a result of their 2020 event. 36.7 per cent said that no public action had taken place, while the remainder (46.7 per cent of respondents) were not sure yet if any public action had or would take place as a result of their event.

Has there been, or do you expect there to be any public action taken as a result of your activity or event?

(Figure 3)



Although it is true that not every event is intended to have a public action (many, for example, are memorials to a lost loved one), these results, which are similar to those recorded last year, suggest there remains room for improvement in harnessing the energy of IOAD partners to create change.



“ The idea of teacup memorials with banners and video is spreading from Georgia to Florida now... It is a heartbreaking, yet powerful event. We had over 1100 teacups this year. ”

– Jennifer, USA



## The effects of COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic had a huge impact on this year's International Overdose Awareness Day.

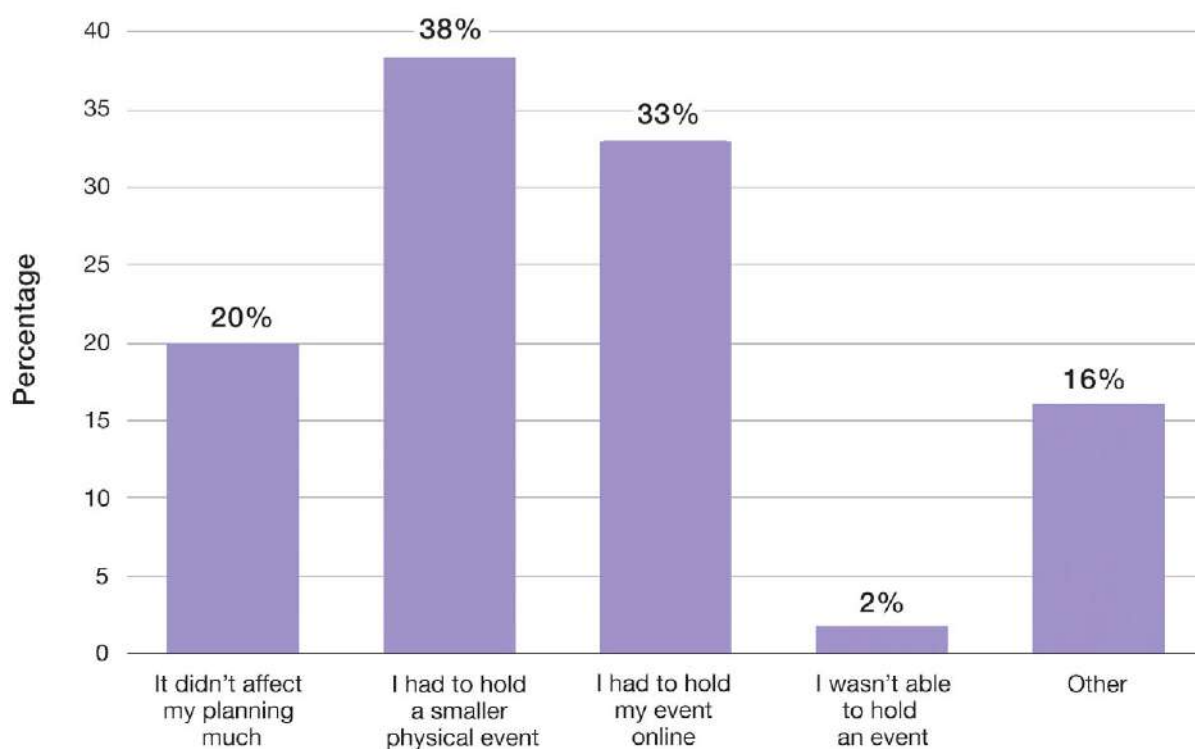
Many jurisdictions have imposed restrictions on movement and physical gatherings. Understandably, many people who usually participate in International Overdose Awareness Day felt they were not able to in 2020 because of the pandemic.

The 2020 Partners' Survey asked two questions specifically related to the pandemic. Firstly, it asked how COVID-19 affected event planning. A subsequent question asked participants if they held their events online or in-person in 2020.

Figure 4 clearly shows that COVID-19 introduced new challenges to event planning.

### How did COVID-19 affect your event planning this year?

(Figure 4)



“ The events and promotion of events around IOAD is very useful to promote awareness for overdose, provide harm reduction training, and remembrance events for people who are grieving. Thank you for everything! ”

38 per cent of respondents reported they held a smaller physical event as a result of the pandemic while one-third moved their event online.

Interestingly, one in five participants reported that their event planning was not heavily affected by COVID-19.

The "Other" option attracted a diverse array of responses, including:

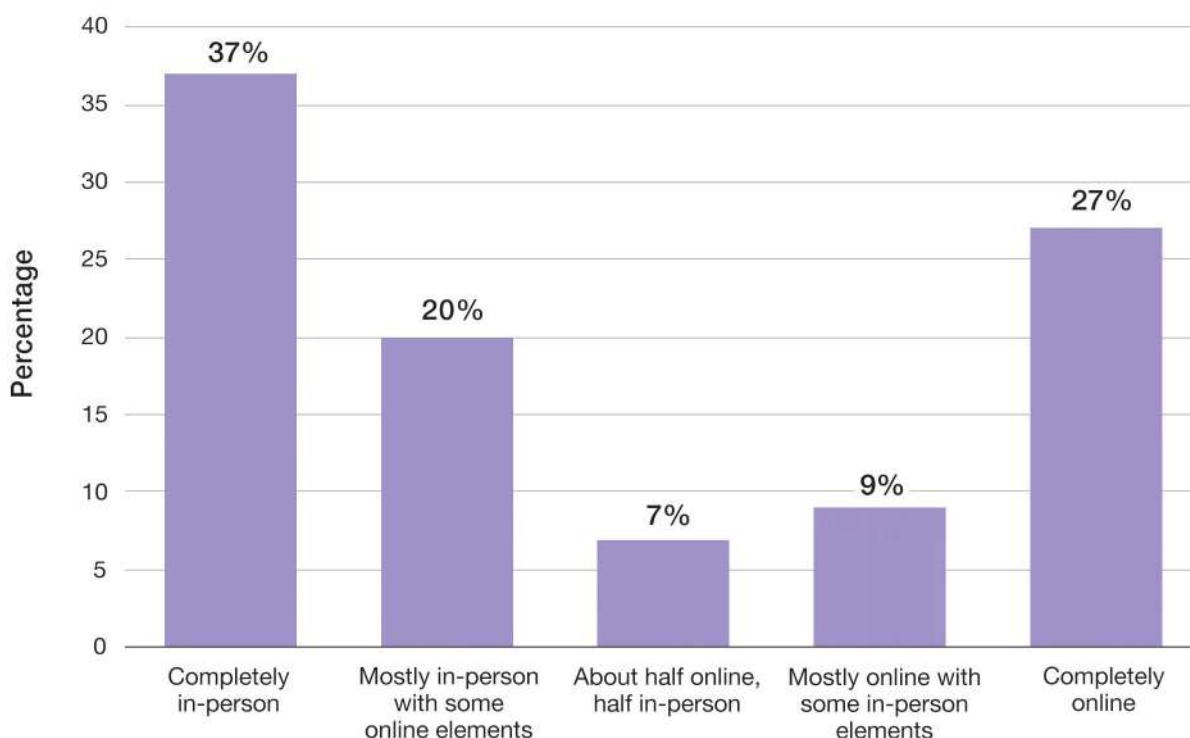
- Events being held outdoors but with physical distancing being enforced, masks being worn and hand sanitiser being distributed.
- Events being moved online but still able to be held in part or in full.
- Event planning beginning later than usual because of the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19.
- Creative event planning such as holding events at venues which were not subject to restrictions such as drive-in movie theatres.
- "Installation" events such as shoes on a bridge (representing people who have passed away from overdose) that people walked or drove or cycled by.

Overall, these responses indicate that survey respondents were highly motivated to hold International Overdose Awareness Day events, including in creative ways which were compliant with local regulations, despite the challenges created by the pandemic.

Survey respondents were also asked if their 2020 event was held online or in person.

### If you held an event this year, was it held online or in person?

(Figure 5)



The responses show that 63 per cent of International Overdose Awareness Day 2020 events included at least some online elements, while only 37 per cent were completely in-person.

This shows that not only did COVID-19 affect most events in some way, but that the decision to provide more support for digital events was the right one.

To conclude this section, it is important to mention that COVID-19 has had extremely damaging effects on people who use drugs, their family and friends, and drug policy advocates beyond the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign.

The pandemic has dramatically escalated the global overdose crisis. COVID-19 overwhelmed health systems already struggling to respond to the overdose crisis while also restricting access to evidence-based treatment services and creating widespread anxiety and mental health risks among people who use drugs. Being “locked down” caused the tolerance of many people who use drugs to decline, increasing their risks of overdose when they resumed using drugs. Disruptions to global supply chains and transportation made the drug supply more volatile, exposed people who use drugs to use drugs from unknown sources and may even have accelerated the shift toward the production of more potent synthetic drugs such as fentanyl.

By disrupting access to treatment, COVID-19 has also made it hard for many to continue their recovery journeys.

At the time of writing, many countries are currently heading toward record overdose death tolls in 2020. In all cases, this is being driven by the effects of COVID-19. One epidemic is aggravating another.

Much of this data is yet to be measured, and the effects will be felt long after the pandemic is over.

People who were previously in recovery have relapsed. Funding has been diverted away from evidence-based programs that help people to stay safe and get healthy. Around the world, drug supply and manufacturing has been changed in unpredictable and dangerous ways.

Activists around the world are not allowing this tragedy to pass unmentioned. They are increasing their demands for better drug policies and remembering the many people they have lost in 2020.

The International Overdose Awareness Day community must support them and follow their lead.



*“ Thank you for the work you are doing around the world to bring awareness and help reduce the stigma around overdoses ”*

– Calandra



## Hillcrest Futures (Scotland)

**Hillcrest is a Scottish social organisation which provides housing, care, support, training, skills and employment opportunities. We are made up of four companies, one of which is Hillcrest Futures.**

### Aims

Hillcrest Futures is a charity supporting people across Scotland with additional needs to live full and vibrant lives. Hillcrest Futures' drug and alcohol services work to support young people and adults at risk of drug and alcohol related harm and overdose.

### Activity Details

To mark IOAD, the harm reduction team raised the profile of their service by hosting a stall in Dundee's city square, along with their partners in NHS Tayside and Police Scotland. The stall displayed posters of Hillcrest Futures' own overdose awareness campaign, ODnotMe. The campaign is aimed at people who use drugs, their families and the wider community to highlight risk factors and promote the use of naloxone, an overdose reversal medication.

### Outcomes

In the last six months alone, Hillcrest Futures' harm reduction team has supplied 610 naloxone kits across Tayside saving hundreds of lives. The team has also worked in partnership with NHS Tayside harm reduction nurses to achieve a world first by becoming the first region to successfully eradicate the deadly blood disease Hepatitis C. Hillcrest Futures' contribution was to utilise the effective relationships staff had already built with service users and encourage them to be tested and supported to access and engage with treatment. Over the past decade, over 2000 tests have been carried out.



**Hillcrest Futures staff with NHS harm reduction nurses and Police Scotland.**

Names of people from left: Scott Menmuir, Police Scotland; James Dale, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker; Christian Sharkey, NHS harm reduction nurse; Claire Johnstone, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker; Kim McIlravey, Police Scotland; Toni-Marie Porter, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker. This photo was taken this year by Hillcrest Futures in Dundee, Scotland at the Overdose Awareness Day event.



**Hillcrest Futures staff with NHS harm reduction nurses.**

Names of people from left: Fiona Holt, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction coordinator; Teresa Flynn, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker; Jordan Wood, Hillcrest Futures service coordinator; Yvonne Nelson, NHS harm reduction nurse; Christian Sharkey, NHS harm reduction nurse; James Dale, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker; Danny Kelly, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction team manager; Toni-Marie Porter, Hillcrest Futures harm reduction project worker. This photo was taken this year by Hillcrest Futures in Dundee, Scotland marking their achievement of eradicating Hepatitis C in Tayside.

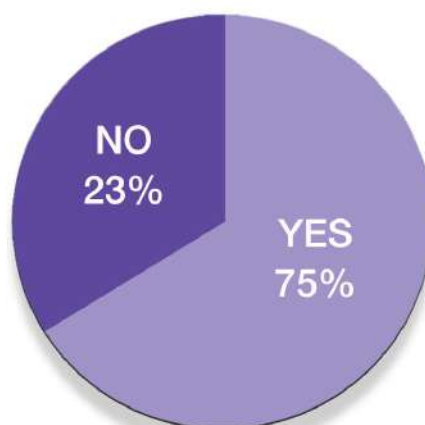
## Media coverage

The 2020 Partners' Survey asked people if their event received media coverage.

More than three-quarters of respondents said that their events had received some form of media coverage, even higher than in 2019 and strong evidence that the issue of overdose remains relevant and important for the media and communities at large.

### Did your activity or event receive media coverage

(Figure 6)

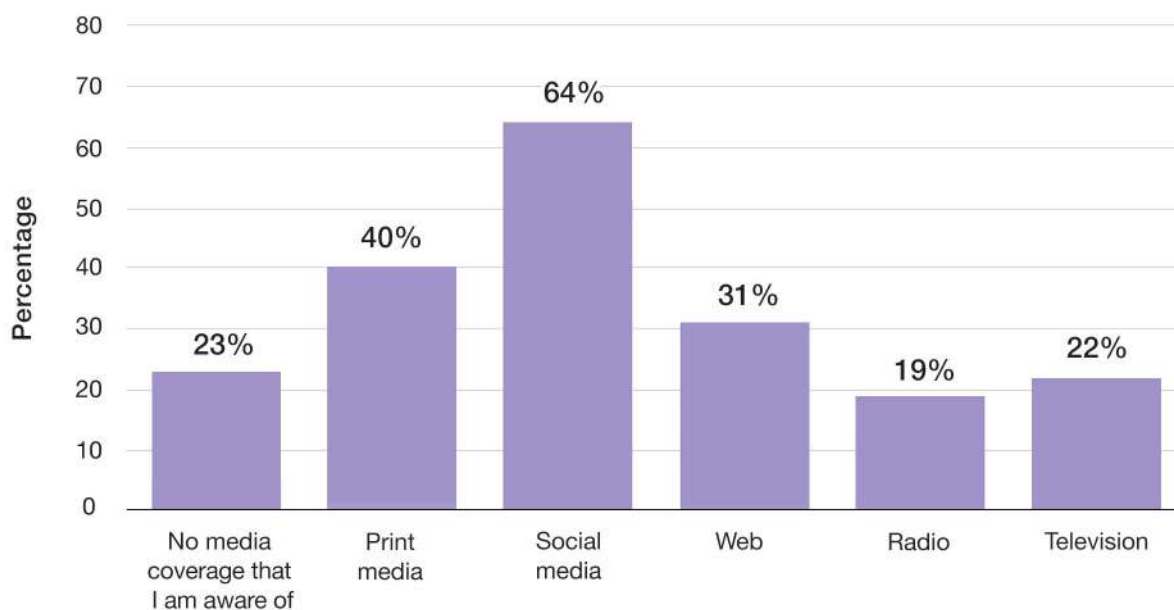


The survey then asked respondents to describe the media coverage which their event received (they could select more than one response if it applied).

Close to two-thirds (64 per cent) of events were covered on social media by either event organisers, participants or third parties including drug policy groups, discussion groups and news organisations.

### How was your event covered?

(Figure 7)



Four in 10 events received print media coverage, suggesting a high level of interest from local media in International Overdose Awareness Day events.

Beyond those forms of media, many events were covered online (by other means than social media), television and radio. Less than a quarter of survey respondents said that their event received no media coverage that they were aware of.

Understanding the media impact of International Overdose Awareness Day campaign, and the way it is discussed, is also an important way to learn about and improve the campaign in future years.

The chart below, developed thanks to a media agency Penington Institute worked with during the campaign, measures media exposure over the course of the 2020 campaign.

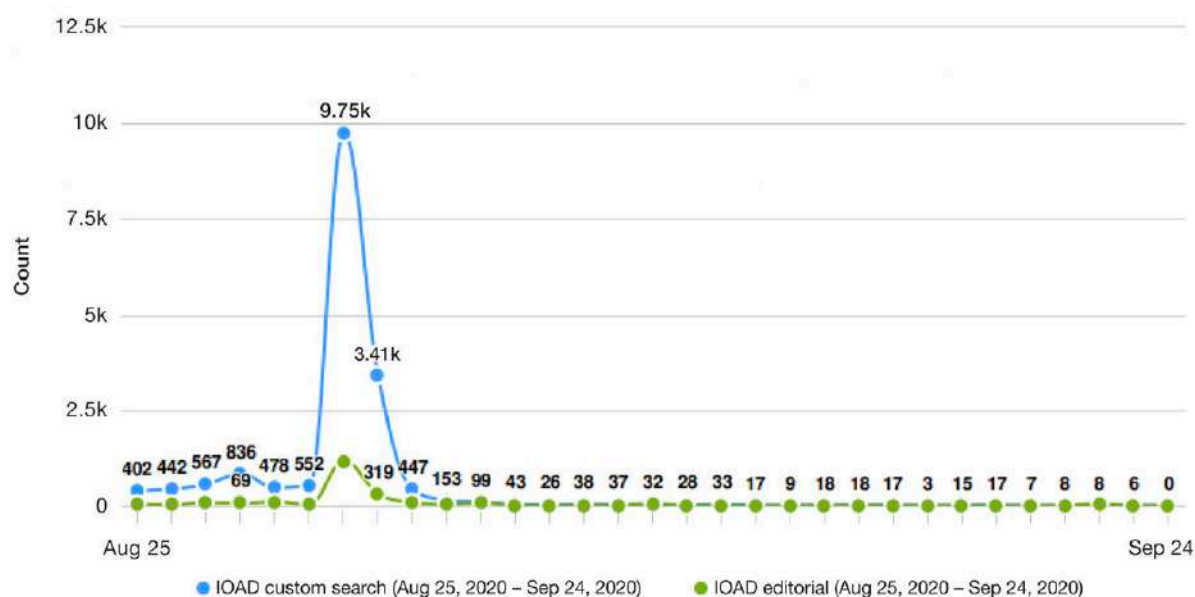
A custom search, capturing discussion about the campaign across traditional media (called editorial) and social media, was set up and is shown here.

It shows there were close to 10,000 items of media (including articles, videos, podcasts, blogs and other content) published on the 31st of August alone – which shows the size and reach of the campaign.

As media attention continues to grow over time, it is critical to harness that energy into calls for change.

## Media exposure

(Figure 8)



*“ I got good feedback from service users on the event and it started a conversation which may have otherwise only happened when someone died. I also got a call from a homeless community project asking about Naloxone and where to get training on it which I was so happy about as they had read it in the paper. ”*

– Susan



## Social media and website traffic

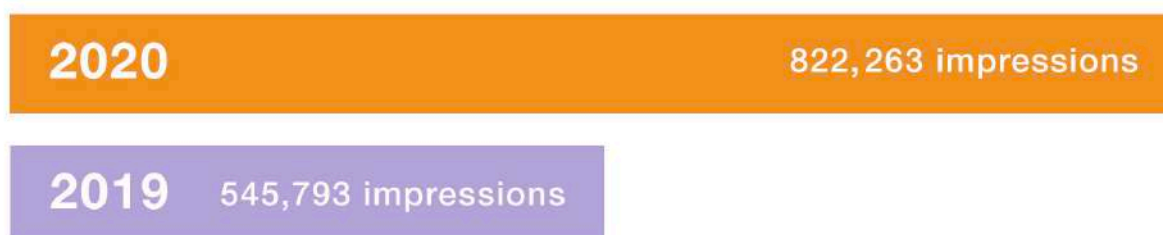
Because of COVID-19 restrictions limiting the ability of people to gather and observe International Overdose Awareness Day in person, social media played a more prominent role than ever in 2020.

The following charts measure impressions across the International Overdose Awareness Day Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages.

Impressions in social media refers to the number of times that content is “seen” by users. A user may see a social media post because they have directly gone to your social media page, or they may see it as they are scrolling their feeds.

Between July 1st and September 30th of this year, the International Overdose Awareness Day Facebook page received 822,263 organic (or unpaid) impressions – a 50.6 per cent increase on the 545,793 organic impressions across the corresponding time period in 2019. This means that content shared on the IOAD Facebook page was seen more than 50 per cent as much as over the same time last year.

### IOAD Facebook organic impression, 2019 vs 2020 (Figure 9)



Between July 1st and September 30th, there was a 51% increase in Facebook impressions in 2020 compared to 2019.

### IOAD Twitter organic impression, 2019 vs 2020 (Figure 10)



Between July 1st and September 30th, there was a 216% increase in Twitter impressions in 2020 compared to 2019.



### IOAD Instagram impressions, 2019 vs 2020

(Figure 11)



Between July 1st and September 30th, there was a 150% increase in Instagram impressions in 2020 compared to 2019.

As these charts show, there was a surge in social media engagement with the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign in 2020. This is a great credit to IOAD Partners and supporters who, despite often being prevented from holding physical events, adapted and overcame those challenges to continue spreading the word.

During the 2020 campaign, the [Overdose Tribute](#) Instagram page was started as a way for people to share stories and photos of their lost loved ones. Please email [tribute@overdoseday.com](mailto:tribute@overdoseday.com) if you would like your loved one featured on this page.

Turning to the International [Overdose Awareness Day website](#), it is clear that this also benefited from the surge in digital engagement with the campaign in 2020.

There were 121,792 total visits to the International Overdose Awareness Day website between July 1st and September 30th, 2020, a 26 per cent increase on the 96,874 visits over the corresponding period last year.

Overall, the website traffic and social media statistics show that the global IOAD community responded to the challenge of COVID-19 by being more active than ever online.

This points the way forward to a truly global, connected campaign in 2021 and beyond.



### IOAD website visits, 2019 vs 2020

(Figure 12)



Between July 1st and September 30th, there was a 26% increase in website visits in 2020 compared to 2019.

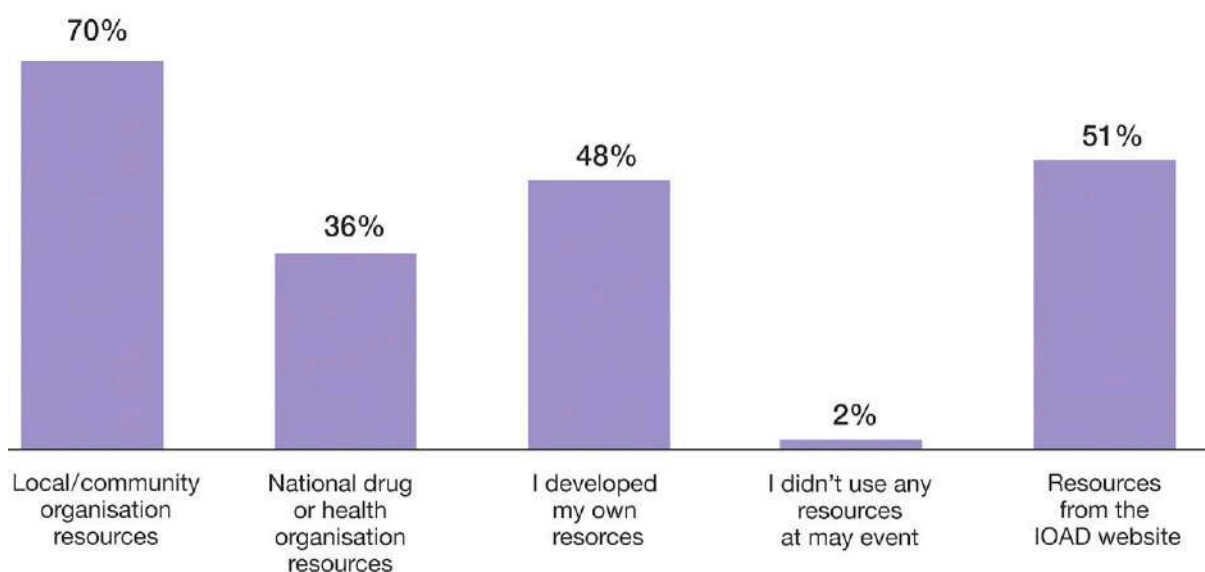
## Campaign resources

One of the main forms of support that Penington Institute provides the global IOAD community is through downloadable resources, all freely available from the website.

Survey participants were asked what resources they used in their activities.

### What resources did you use to help plan, promote or run your activity or event?

(Figure 13)



Like 2019, slightly more than half of respondents used resources available on the International Overdose Awareness Day website for their event in 2020.

This year, as part of the move to a more digital campaign, a suite of advocacy resources was created to support campaign participants make change online and in their communities. These resources include:

- A social media kit;
- An Ideas Bank document;
- A Digital Campaign and Event Guide;
- A generic media release for event-holders; and
- Template letters to community leaders.

These advocacy resources were well-received and will be expanded to enable the IOAD community to keep pushing for change in future years.

In total, International Overdose Awareness Day resources were downloaded more than 87,000 times from the beginning of 2020 to the end of September.

Beyond the resources available on the website, many IOAD partners (70 per cent) also used resources from local and community organisations. This shows that International Overdose Awareness Day remains,

at its heart, a grassroots campaign where local issues matter most.

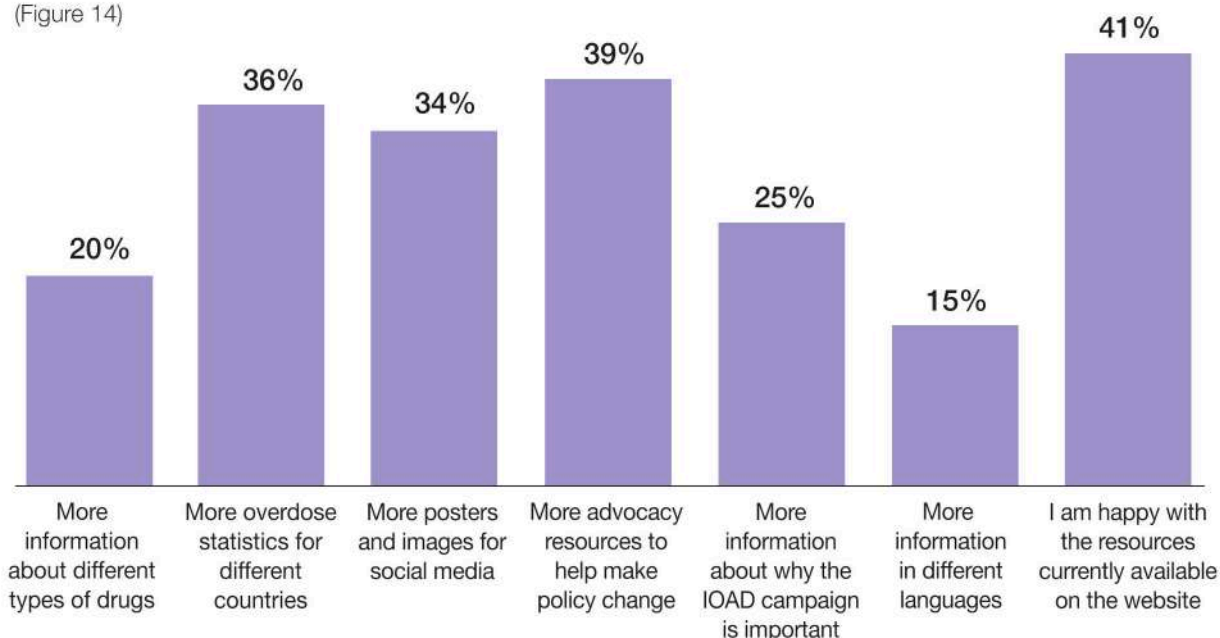
Further supporting that, close to half of survey respondents developed their own resources while 36 per cent of respondents used resources from national drug or health organisations.

IOAD Partners were also asked in the survey what type of resources they would like to see more of on the website (multiple responses were allowed).

Although the single most common response was happiness with the resources currently available, the other responses suggest a diverse variety of opinions about how the global IOAD community could be better supported with the resources on offer.

### What resources would you like to see more of on the IOAD website?

(Figure 14)



*“ Thank you for starting this.  
In loving memory of those  
we’ve lost, and in support  
for those fighting. ”*

– Jennifer



## Médecins du Monde International Overdose Awareness Day event (Myanmar)

Overdose is one of the main causes of death among PWUD in Kachin state. Overdoses are under-reported, and data remains scarce. One of the main problems regarding the management of overdose cases is that the people (family, friends, and even some medical staff) are afraid of taking action as they fear the consequences in case of the person dies or consider the drug use as criminal.

People who use drugs are especially afraid of having to deal with the police or the local administrators. Another issue is that naloxone is not easily available (not in pharmacies for instance), and few people are properly trained on overdose prevention and management with Naloxone and only medical people can provide naloxone injection in Myanmar.

MdM organises events on International Overdose Awareness Day in each of the project sites in different ways yearly. MdM enhances the communication with the stakeholders to desensitize the myths on

responding to overdosed people. In addition, in some of the wards and villages where overdose cases are very common, MdM organises overdose awareness sessions with interested community leaders.

### Objectives of IOAD events

- 1 To increase awareness of overdose.
- 2 To provide education and information about overdose prevention and management.
- 3 To encourage local stakeholders and drug users to seek help when overdoses occur.



Overdose Awareness training to PWUD in DIC, Myitkyina, Myanmar. Photo: Seng Nu Pan.

## Key messages

- 1 Overdose death is preventable if we know what to do.
- 2 Naloxone is a lifesaving medicine.
- 3 You can save the lives of your friends, families and community.

## Activities

### 1. Awareness Sessions

#### Myitkyina Project Site

The Myitkyina team organised two International Overdose Awareness activities: an overdose management and referral awareness session with training for local leaders and Pat Jasan leaders on 28th August 2020; and peer-to-peer awareness raising sessions for people who use drugs on 31st August 2020.

#### Mogaung Project Site

The Mogaung team organised overdose management and referral awareness sessions in Shwe Inn, Man Ywet Village and Ka Nyin Myeing Village. In addition, MdM organised an International Overdose Awareness Day event at a drop-in centre with people who inject drugs.

#### Hopin Project Site

The Hopin team organised an overdose management and referral awareness session with a training approach to 10 local stakeholders in the Township administration office. Six outreach awareness sessions for were also organised for 50 participants in the Hopin area. These sessions focused on the risks and prevention factors of overdose. MdM distributed small notebooks and stickers to the household leaders, community members (PWUDs) and village leaders with the following key messages:

- Don't let your friend die, support him.
- Overdose death is preventable.
- Naloxone saves lives.
- Protect our community, all lives matter! Prevent Overdose!

## Outcomes

Through the training sessions, MdM gave out information to local leaders and the wider community about how overdose deaths can be prevented and how people in the community can manage overdose and save lives.



Community representative from Myitkyina town, Myanmar.  
Photo: Seng Nu Pan



Community representative from Myitkyina town, Myanmar.  
Photo: Seng Nu Pan



Community representative from Myitkyina town, Myanmar.  
Photo: Than Aung

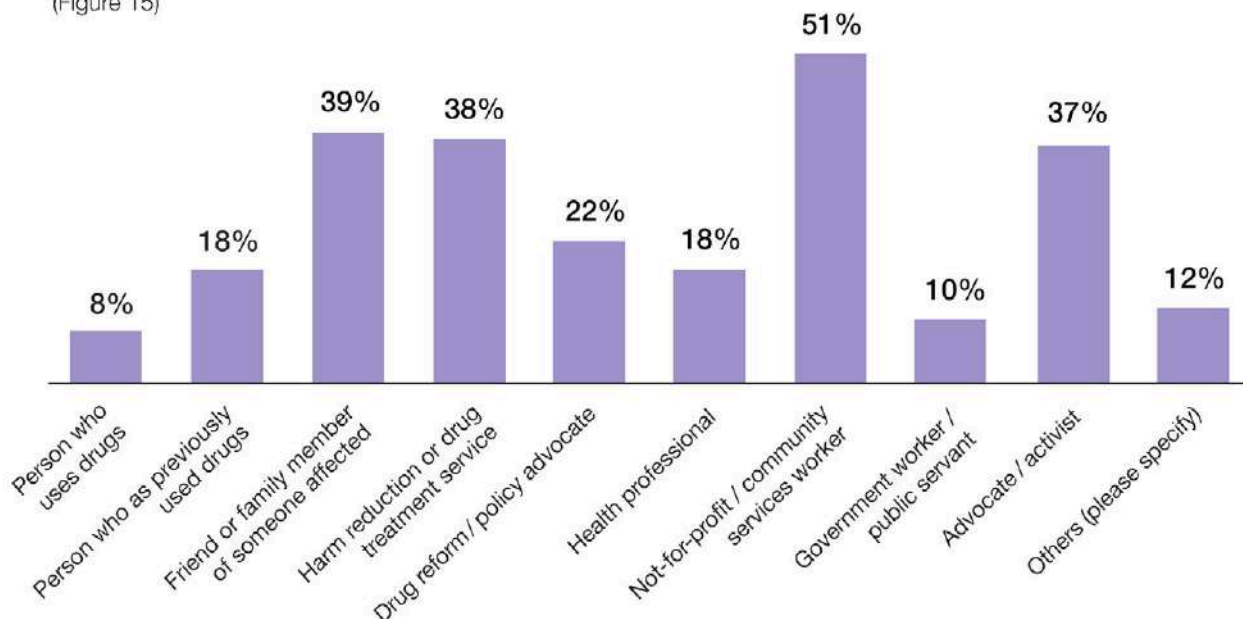
## The International Overdose Awareness Day community

The success of IOAD begins with learning more about the people who give so much of their time and energy to support the cause.

As has been the case in past years, the Partners' Survey in 2020 asked participants about themselves.

### Which of these best describes you?

(Figure 15)



As the responses to this question indicate, the global IOAD community is diverse.

Although slightly over half of respondents work in the not-for-profit or community services sector, many respondents are also friends or family members of people affected by overdose. Often, they are also actively involved with harm reduction and advocacy. 17.6 per cent of respondents identify as people who previously used drugs, while 8.3 per cent of respondents identify as people who use drugs.

As well as understanding what walks of life the IOAD community comes from, it is important to understand the frequency with which they organise and attend events.

Survey respondents were also asked how many times they had previously held an International Overdose Awareness Day event.



*“ The IOAD website and resources are so amazing, and we appreciate everything that this organization does to impact overdose. ”*

– Sharon



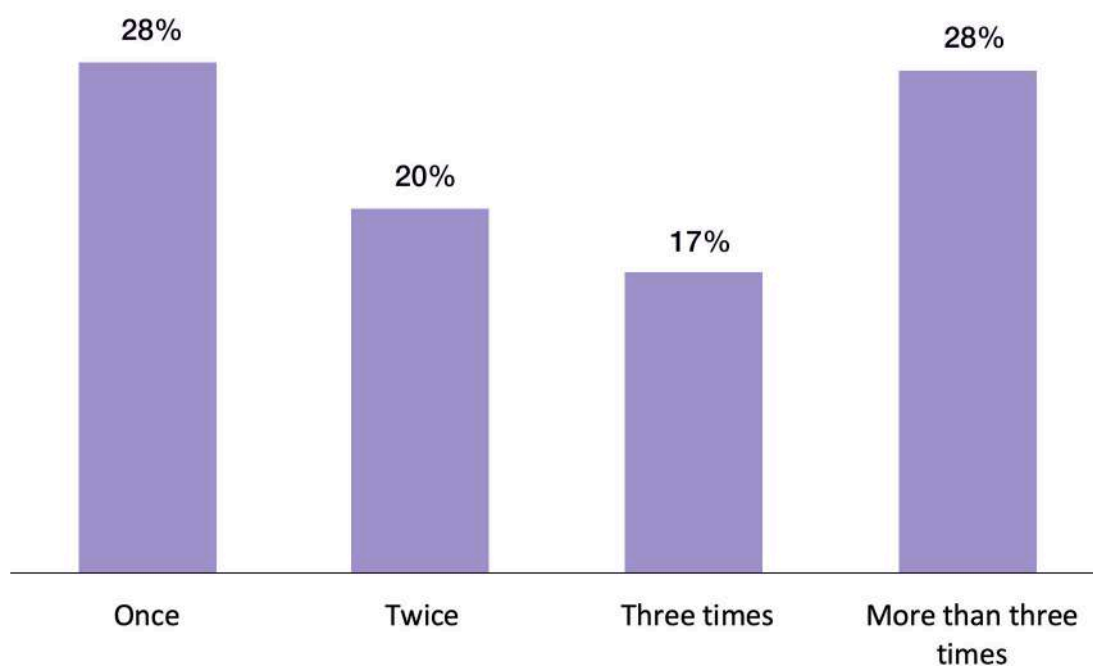
Strikingly, there were as many first-year participants as those who had held an event more than three times.

This suggests that the campaign is retaining those people who have participated for many years as well as also creating ways for new people to join in the campaign. This is key if the campaign is to continue to grow and make its mark.

Approximately three per cent of respondents to the 2019 Partners' Survey were holding an event for the first time. Last year's Partners' Report mentioned that increasing the share of the IOAD community holding an event for the first time was a high priority. That this figure has grown so much in the space of just one year suggests that people are still learning about International Overdose Awareness Day and being inspired to take part.

### Including 2020, how many times have you held an International Overdose Awareness Day event?

(Figure 16)



“ Thank you for all you do to bring awareness to the overdose crisis in our world. ”  
– Randy



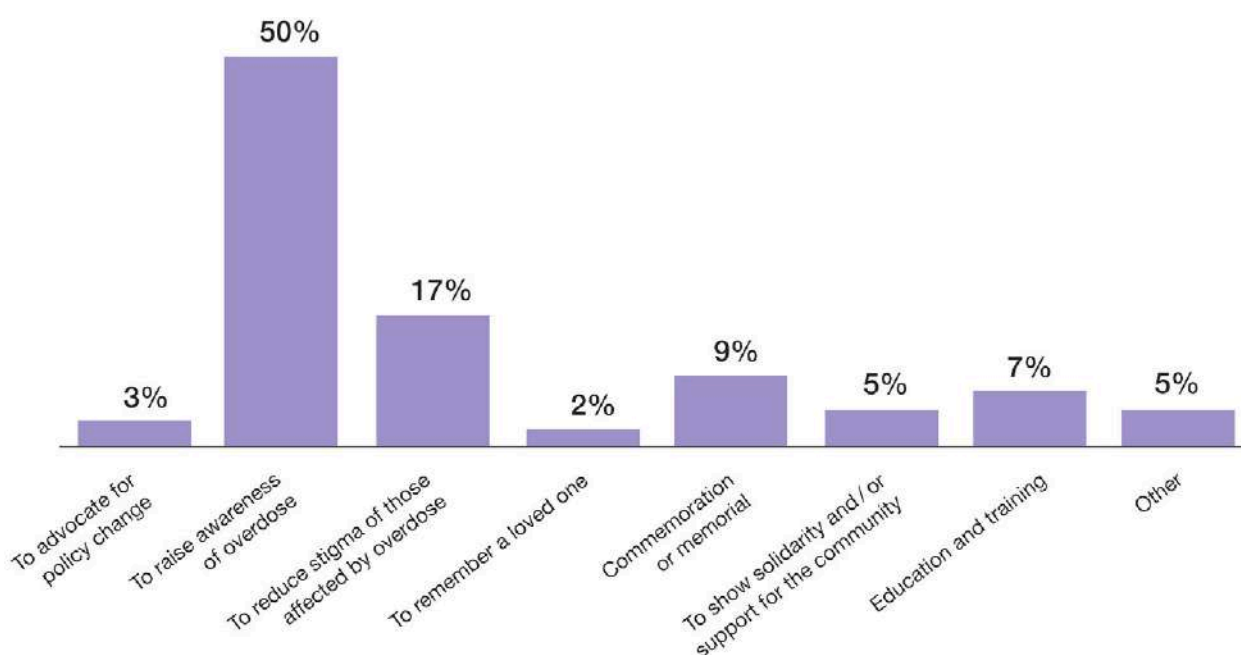
As in previous years, participants were asked what motivated them to hold an event this year.

The most prominent reason was to raise awareness of overdose. This was the motivation for half of all respondents, compared to 38 per cent last year. Approximately one in six respondents were most motivated by reducing stigma for those affected by overdose. Other popular reasons included commemorating lost loved ones and education and training.

Most of the responses marked "Other" were because participants could not narrow their motivations to one reason.

### What was your main reason for holding your event or activity?

(Figure 17)



“ We want to ensure everyone recognizes that IOAD is not only to remember those we have lost but also to celebrate those in recovery support those struggling, prevent and end the stigma. ”

– Ellis



## Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council Tasmania (Australia)

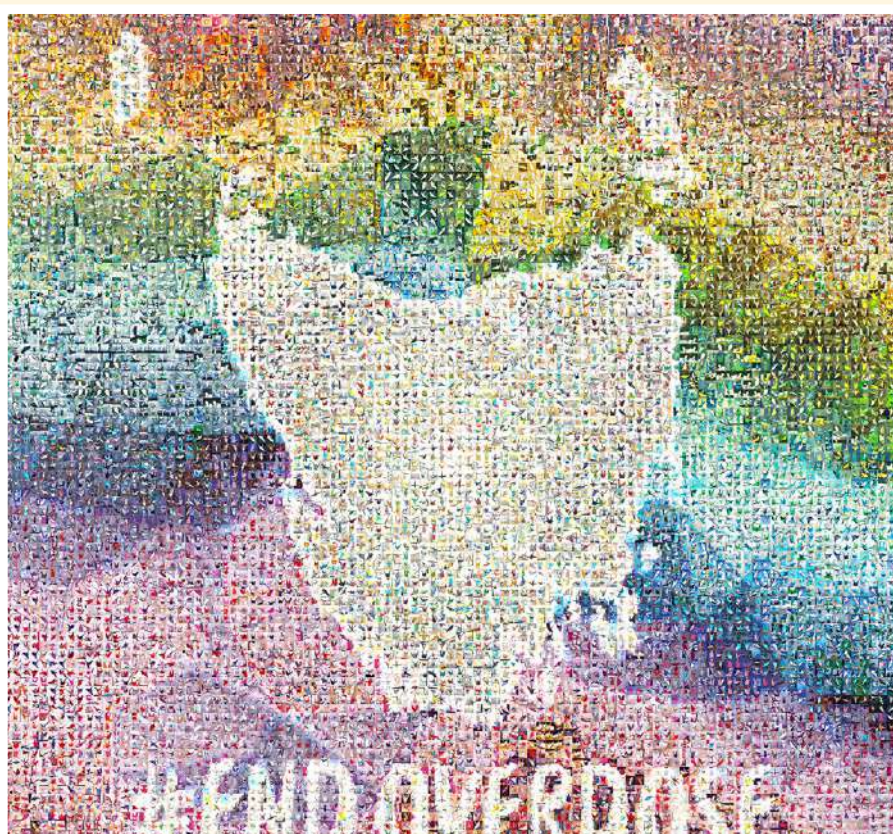
Over the past 2 years the Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs Council asked the Tasmanian community to help fold origami cranes to raise awareness of the risks of overdose, with a goal of reaching 10,000 cranes by IOAD on the 31st of August 2020. We encouraged people to use folding a crane as a gentle way to start a conversation, break down stigma, and remember those that may have sadly already been lost to overdose.

Like many others in 2020, we adapted our original 10,000 cranes project plans to take physical and social distancing into account. We invited ATDC members, other community organisations and the Tasmanian public to fold a crane to remember those lost to overdose and wish for a world free from overdose harm and send us a photograph.

Contributions came from all over Tasmania; from alcohol and other drug treatment services and community groups, to university students, parliamentarians and everyday Tasmanians. 10,000 images were combined to form the #EndOverdose mosaic, representing a total of 10,035 origami cranes (5,796 in 2020 and 4,239 in 2019) folded in support of overdose awareness.

Our IOAD 2020 event captured the imagination of many, but it also sparked important conversations about overdose in the wider community. The Tasmanian Minister for Mental Health and Wellbeing, Jeremy Rockliff, shone a light on our event and the IOAD campaign in a speech to Tasmanian State Parliament.

The #EndOverdose mosaic is a lasting piece that will support our future IOAD work and encapsulates the importance of raising overdose awareness. If you look closely, overdose has a profound and unique impact on each person affected and those around them. Take a step back, however, and you'll see that overdose impacts people from all walks of life, and it's only by coming together that we have hope to end overdose.



## Event holder satisfaction

The International Overdose Awareness Day campaign is only as strong as its community, and it is crucial that the event is meaningful and satisfying to those who participate.

The 2020 Partners' Survey asked respondents how satisfied they were with their events.

The response was hugely positive.

Ninety one per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their event was a success in 2020.

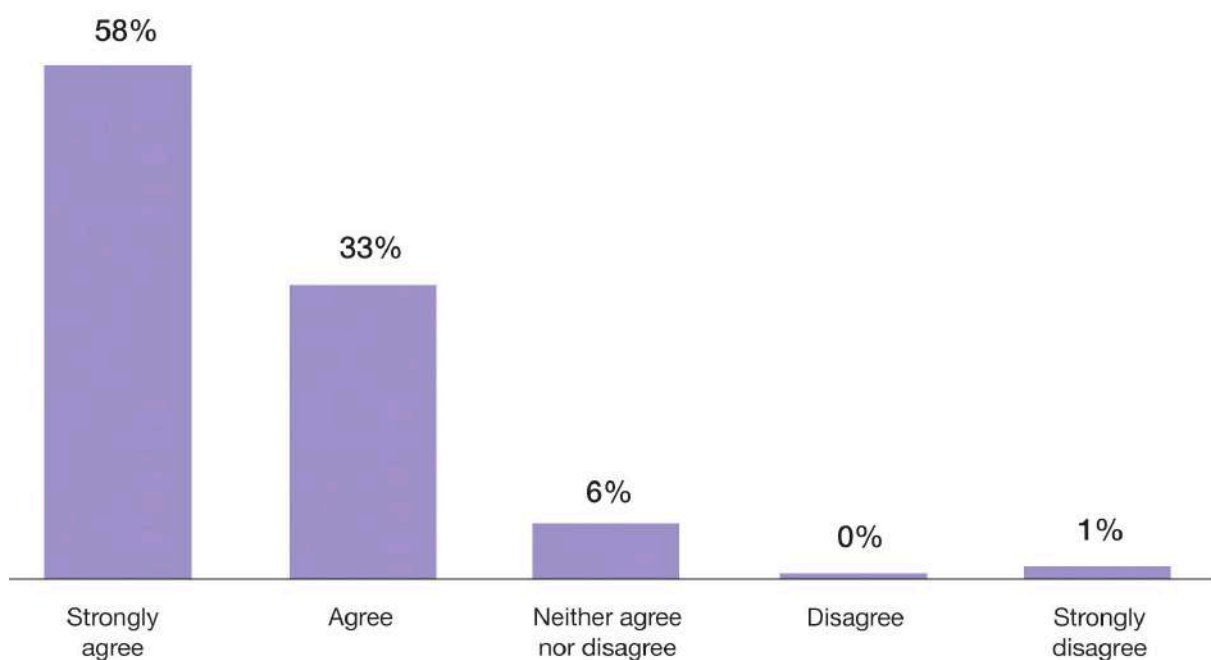
Only four people agreed or strongly disagreed with the proposition that their event was a success this year.

Despite these positive results, it is as important as ever to understand how the IOAD community can hold even better, more purposeful, more meaningful events.

A separate question, which was new in this year's Partners' Survey, asked how satisfied event respondents were with the support they received throughout the campaign.

### Bases on the reason you had for holding your event or activity, your event was a success.

(Figure 18)



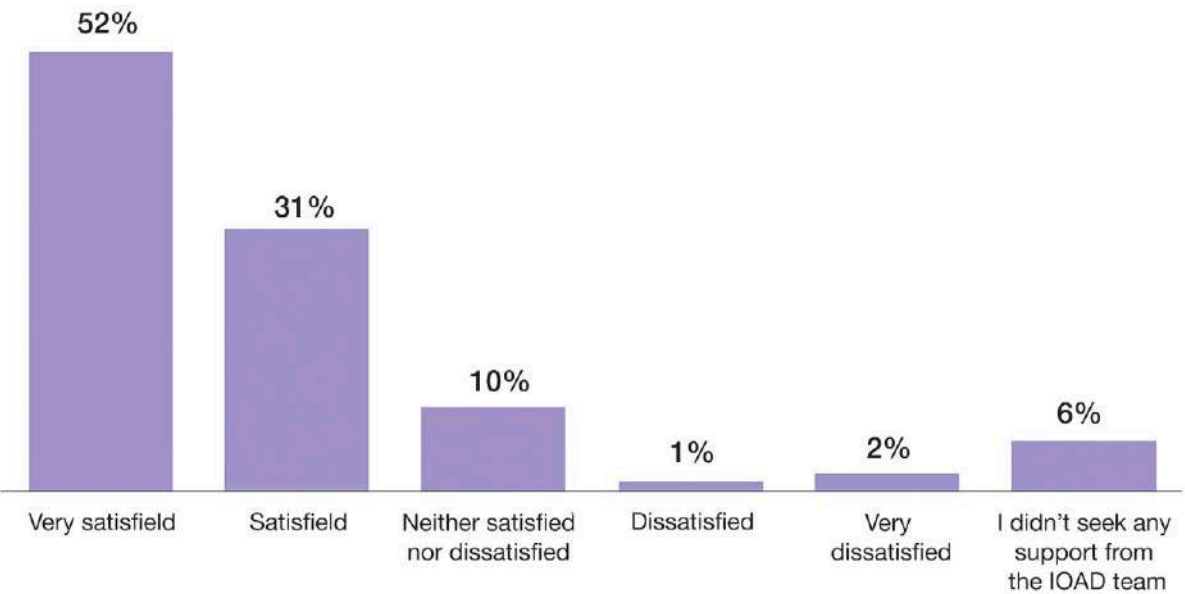
“ We had a remembrance event and lit candles. we provided the candles and candle bags with hearts. the town hall clock was lit purple for the event. We had coverage on radio, online press and social media. during the rest of the year we will continue to promote overdose awareness and provide naloxone to the community. ”

– Amanda

Well over half of all respondents (52 per cent) said they were “very satisfied” with the support provided by the International Overdose Awareness Day team while close to a third (31 per cent) said they were “satisfied” with the support provided.

How satisfied are you with the support provided by the International Overdose Awareness Day team in 2020?

(Figure 19)



## Event Attendance

As we have already seen, there are many different types of International Overdose Awareness Day events, held for different reasons.

It is also important to understand how these events looked like in 2020, and survey respondents were asked what types of people attended their 2020 event and in what numbers.

The responses were similar to those recorded in 2019, with most responses receiving within five per cent of what they did in that year's Partners' Survey.

There were, however, a few notable differences. Of those surveyed, the general public made up 73 per cent of their audience this year, up from 64 per cent last year. Beyond that, respondents indicated a slightly smaller share of events involved health/community workers and politicians or other government representatives.

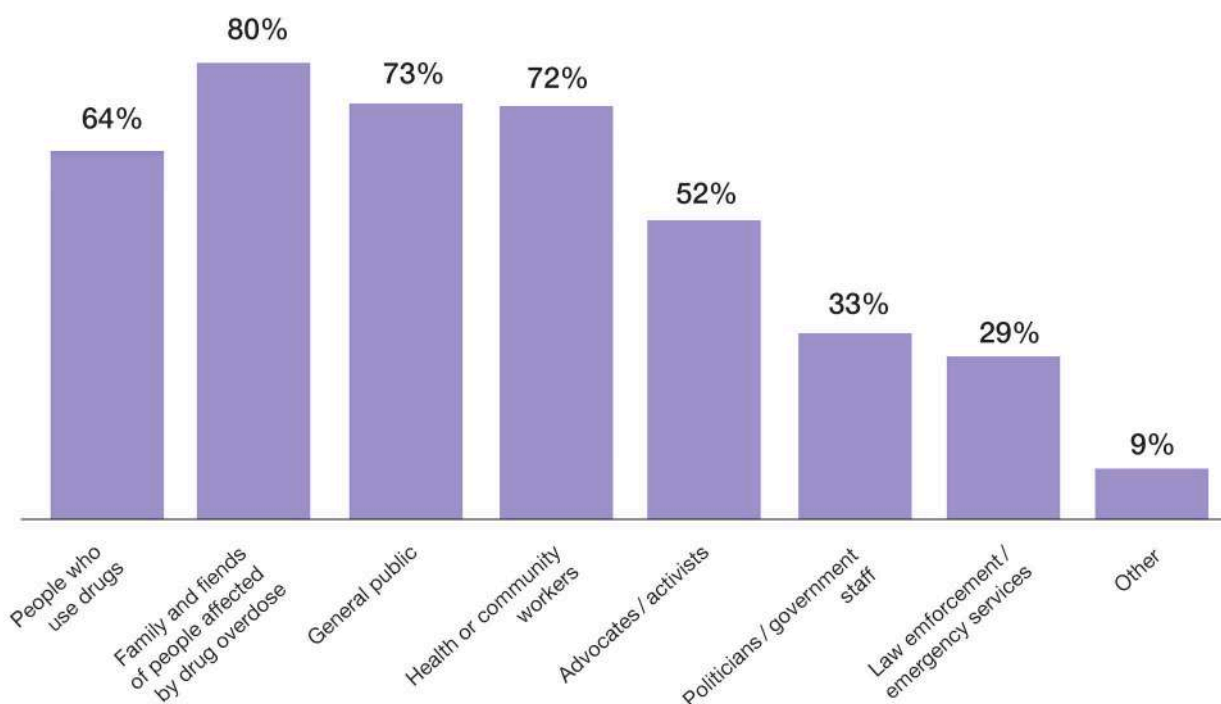
It is heartening to see evidence that most events included people who use drugs, family and friends of people affected by overdose, the general public, and advocates/activists. They traditionally represent the core constituencies of International Overdose Awareness Day and it is vital that they remain an important part of the campaign.

The share of events which included members of the general public, politicians and members of law enforcement and emergency services is also highly encouraging.

Increasing the profile of International Overdose Awareness Day within these groups is a vital part of making our movement successful.

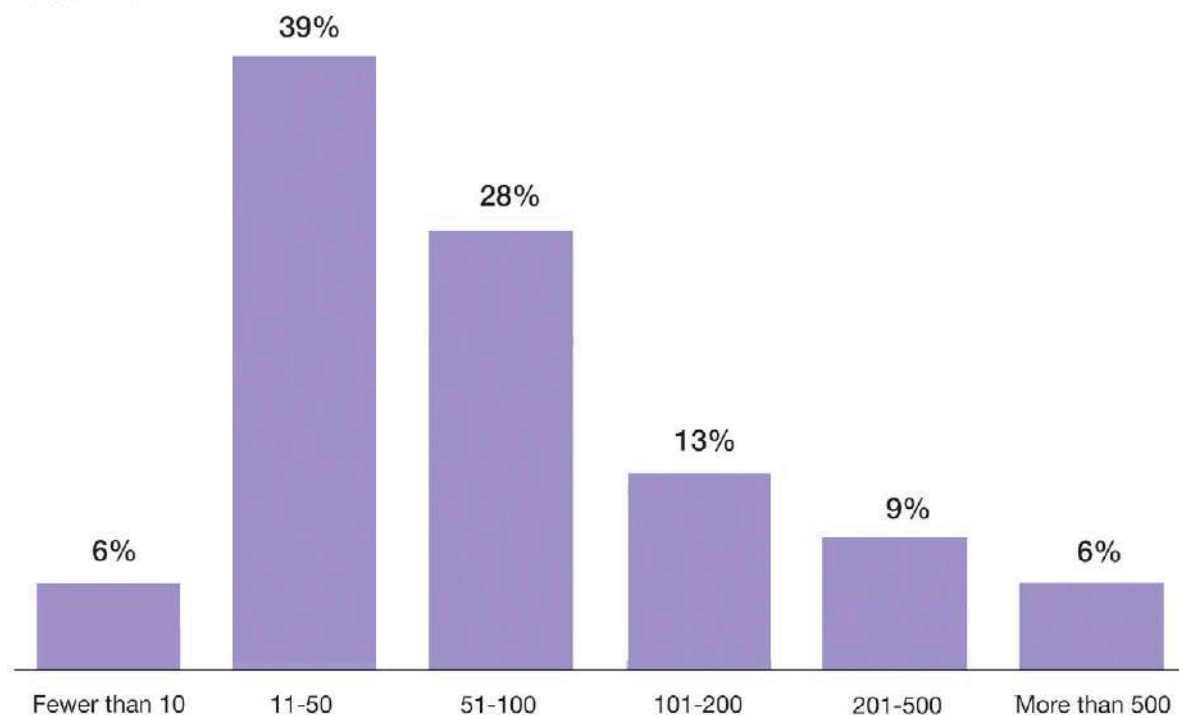
### Who participated in your event?

(Figure 20)



### How many people would you say attended your event this year?

(Figure 21)



Survey respondents indicated the most common number of event attendees was 11-50. This number is typical of most commemoration or memorial events and workplace-based events. This also suggests that, for most people, International Overdose Awareness Day is a chance to call for change in their local communities.

While there were slightly fewer events this year than in 2019, there were an increased number of attendees. Of those surveyed, there were three times as many events this year with more than 500 people. This is a feat made possible by the increased number of events held online because of COVID-19 restrictions. This represents the true growth potential of the IOAD.



## Overdose Awareness Day Live (United Kingdom)

Overdose Awareness Day Live is a collective of UK addiction recovery arts organisations who work together to deliver pop-up performances across the country on August 31st each year to commemorate International Overdose Awareness Day and bring recovery communities together. The performances we create are ritual acts of awareness raising, remembrance and respect, and this year were created and delivered digitally.

Small Performance Adventures, a participatory arts organisation working with people in addiction and mental health recovery based in Brighton, worked in partnership with the following organisations:

- Edit Sweet in Brighton – a recovery-led film organisation.
- We are not Saints in Brighton, the UK's first recovery record label.
- Our Space at The Theatre Royal Plymouth – a project for adults with complex needs.
- Bristol Drugs Project, an organisation offering support for drug use issues.
- Outside Edge in London, UK's leading recovery theatre company.

As due to pandemic we were unable to deliver live simultaneous performances across the UK, we first of all gathered as a larger group on zoom and then followed up with a range of online theatre and music workshops that set video based tasks for participants

to complete at home or with others outdoors in a socially distanced fashion. Musicians in each city also worked on creating music to accompany the videos. Workshops were attended by over fifty participants all who had been affected by overdose in different ways. Workshops also gave people the chance to process their feelings and access peer support. At the end of the project, the groups met on a final zoom call to evaluate and plan for next year.

We created a series of four videos, one to represent each city involved (Brighton, Bristol, London and Plymouth) all created with and by participants in mental health and addiction recovery. The videos were shared on social media throughout the day on August 31st on the social media platforms of each organisation with the video being viewed more than 10,000 times on the day. Feedback from audiences was extremely positive. In 2021, the partnership group plans to add to more UK cities and create videos and live performances to be shared across the country. Longer term aims include making this an international event.



## 2021 and beyond

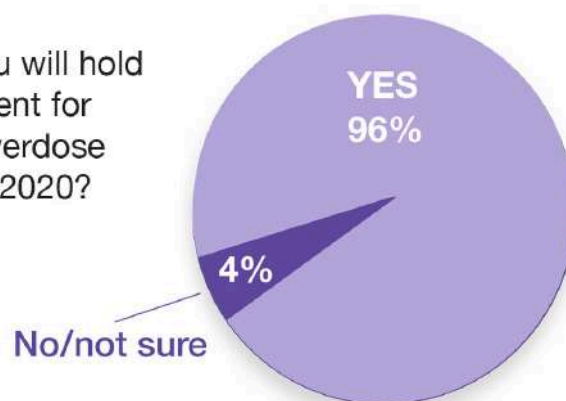
The best way to understand if a person considered their participation in the International Overdose Awareness Day campaign worthwhile is to ask them if they are planning to get involved next year.

An overwhelming 96 per cent of respondents believe they will hold an International Overdose Awareness Day event again in 2020.

A result like this suggests that the vast majority of survey respondents believed that their participation in the campaign is worth their time and that they plan to remain active and engaged in this work.

Do you think you will hold an activity or event for International Overdose Awareness Day 2020?

(Figure 22)



## Conclusion

2021 will mark 20 years since the first International Overdose Awareness Day.

Since it was first observed, the death toll from overdose has continued to rise, while the political change required to address this growing crisis has not materialised. Families and communities have been devastated and not enough has been done to implement the kinds of policies that save lives.

COVID-19 has escalated the overdose crisis and its effects on people will be felt for years to come..

This campaign will honour those who have been lost to drug overdose and to prevent this from happening in the future, both at individual and broader social levels.

But we cannot do this alone.

The success of this work depends on governments, health organisations, civil society groups, donors, volunteers, and individuals in hundreds of countries around the world.

Together, we can continue to provide an inclusive and engaging event that resonates with those affected by overdose and while also engaging the general public.

With continued support and encouragement, International Overdose Awareness Day will prosper while also engaging into a worldwide movement that generates real change and protects the lives of our loved ones.

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In recognition of International Overdose Awareness  
Day 2020 the Illinois Department of Human  
Services lit up the Chicago skyline in purple.

