# Harm Reduction in 12 minutes

ILIANA ESPINOSA-RAVI, MSW, MPH

# CRA – Who we are & What we do

- One of oldest and largest HR programs in the country
- Focus: reducing drug-related harm
  - SAP+
  - Testing
  - OD prevention
- 2018 demographics
  - RACE -> 46% African American, 31% White, 21% Latino, 2% Multiple Race
  - GENDER -> 63% men, 34% women, 3% Trans/Gender non-conforming/Nonbinary
  - AGE -> 2% <25, 20% 25-34, 30% 35-44, 25% 45-54, 18% 55-64, 5% 65-74

# Harm Reduction

The philosophy and practice of respectfully collaborating with any person to assist *any positive change* as a person defines it for him/her/themselves

*Photo by Nigel Brunsdon*

# Drug War Origins – less about drugs, more about people

- 1870s anti-opium laws targeted Chinese immigrants
- Early 1900s anti-cocaine laws targeted black men
- 1910-1920s anti-marijuana laws targeted people of Mexican descent
- Anslinger to Nixon
  - "The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people. You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin, and then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities. We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did."

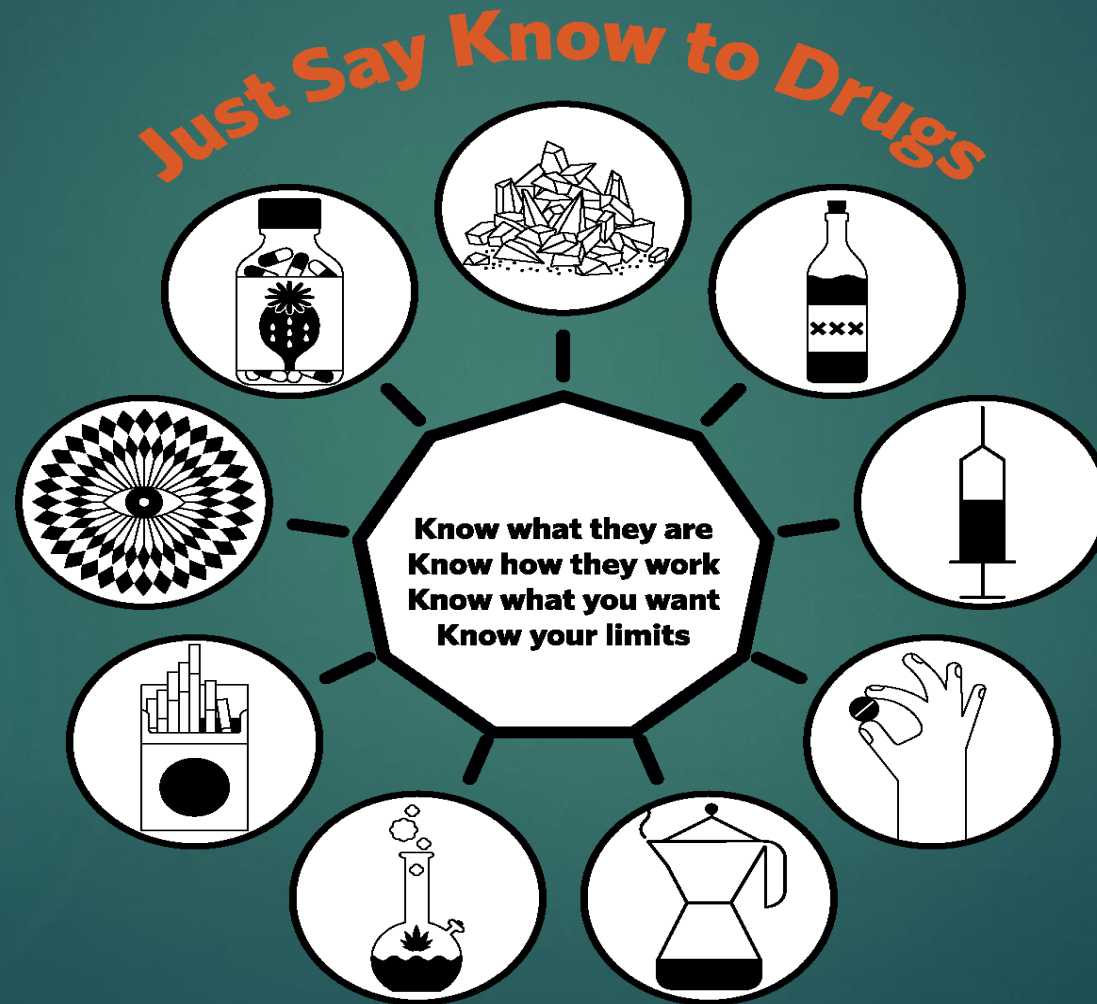    --John Ehrlichman, former Policy Advisor to President Nixon

# What are drugs??

- "Any substance that in small amounts produces significant changes in the body, mind, or both….All drugs become poisons in high enough doses, and some poisons are useful drugs in low enough doses." – Dr. Andrew Weil

# Understanding Harm Reduction

- Origins: grassroots movement by and for PWUD & PWDSW
- An approach that seeks to uphold respect for the autonomy and humanity of others as the first priority
- About safety planning, practical strategies, & access to options
  - Ex. Buffet
- Acknowledges that drug use exists on a continuum
  - Never Use = Abstinence
    - Experimental Use
      - Occasional Use
        - Regular Use
          - Heavy Use
            - Chaotic Use = Dependence
- Recognizes both harms and benefits of substance use
- It works
  - -> tx in OPS in CA vs. abstinence-based

# Harm Reduction Says….



Just Say Know to Drugs

Know what they are
Know how they work
Know what you want
Know your limits

# Harm reduction is normalized and all around us

- What are some examples???

# Understanding Stigma

- Media
  - Sensationalizing
- Law & Policy
  - Drug testing for public assistance programs
- Institutional
  - Judge ordering people to non evidence-based programs
- Community
  - NIMBYism
- Individual &/or self-stigma
  - Between PWUD on ROA (injection vs. smoking)
  - Internalized stigma around MAT

# Stigma functions as....

► Moralizing, Criminalizing, Pathologizing, & Marginalizing

► Difference -> keeps people out

► Danger -> keeps people away

► Discrimination -> keeps people down

*slide content adapted from a presentation by: Harm reduction coalition*

# Language

| Try this | Instead of this |
|---|---|
| **substance use, non-prescribed use** | Abuse, misuse, problem use, non-compliant use |
| **person who uses/injects drugs &/or person who sells drugs** | Drug user/abuser; drug dealer |
| **person with a dependence on...** | Addict, junkie, druggie, alcoholic |
| **person experiencing drug dependence** | Suffering from addiction, has a drug habit |
| **person who has stopped using drugs** | Clean, sober, drug-free |
| **person with lived experience of drug dependence** | Ex-addict, former addict, used to be a… |
| **person disagrees** | Lacks insight, in denial, resistant, unmotivated |
| **treatment has not been effective/chooses not to** | Not engaged, non-compliant |
| **person's needs are not being met** | Drug seeking, manipulative, splitting |
| **currently using drugs** | Using again, fallen off the wagon, had a setback |
| **no longer using drugs** | Stayed clean, maintained recovery |
| **positive/negative urine drug screen** | Dirty / clean urine |
| **used/unused syringe** | Dirty / clean needle, dirties |
| **pharmacotherapy is treatment** | Replacing one drug for another |

Source: Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies

# Thank you

iliana@anypositivechange.org

https://anypositivechange.org/