



**H**OMELESS &  
**H**OUSING  
**R**ESOURCE  
**C**ENTER

# **Xylazine: An Introduction for Service Providers Working with Unhoused Individuals**

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July 13, 2023

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# **Xylazine in the Drug Supply: An Introduction for Service Providers Working with Unhoused Individuals**

July 13th, 2023

# National Health Care for the Homeless Council

## Who We Are

- Since 1986, we have brought together thousands of health care professionals, medical respite care providers, people with lived experience of homelessness, and advocates. Our 200+ Organizational Members include Health Care for the Homeless programs, respite programs, and housing and social service organizations across the country.

## What We Do

- We work to improve homeless health care through training and technical assistance, researching and sharing best practices, advocating for real solutions to end homelessness, and uplifting voices of people experiencing homelessness.

## What You Can Do

- Learn more about how you can help support our mission.

# Self-care

- These can be difficult topics as they intersect with our personal and professional experiences.
- In this webinar we discuss substance use and harm reduction. These topics may feel uncomfortable and what is discussed may be different than your personal beliefs or experience, and that is ok.
- Please take care of yourself as you need to.

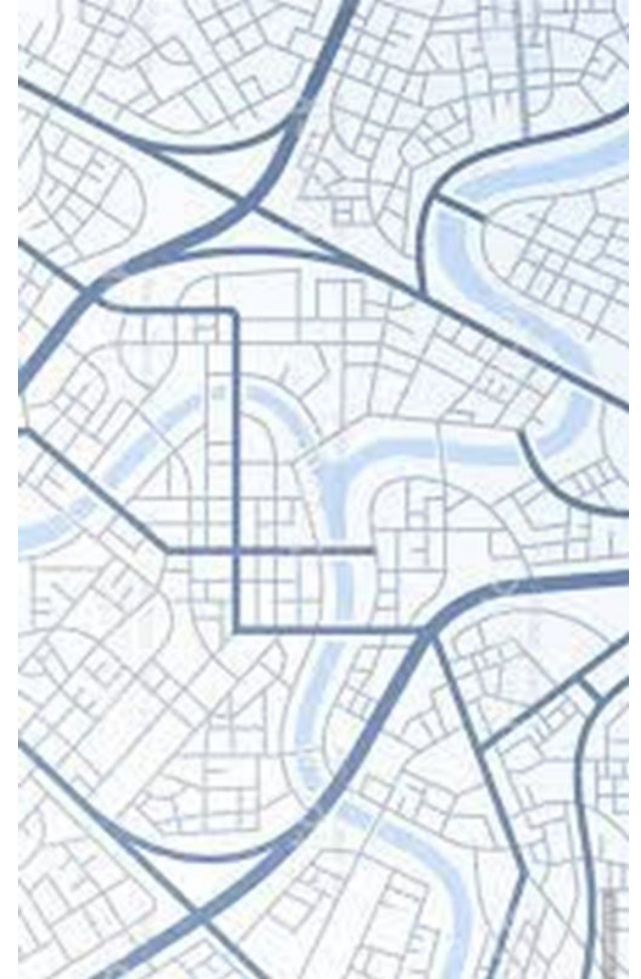




# Agenda

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- Introduction to xylazine
- Overdose response with xylazine contaminated supply
- Harm reduction approaches
- Supporting wound care needs
- Panel discussion
- Q & A





# Speakers

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**Hillary Miller**, MSN, BSN, RN – Registered Nurse, Project Home Health Services Street Medicine Team

**Shawn Westfahl** – Overdose Prevention Coordinator, Prevention Point Philadelphia

**Kate Gleason Bachman**, MPH, BSN, RN – Clinical and Quality Improvement Nurse Manager, National Health Care for the Homeless Council

**Brian R.**, Content Expert, Philadelphia, PA

**Brooke P.**, Content Expert, Philadelphia, PA

# Xylazine Basics

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- What is Xylazine?
- Use as an Additive
- Impact of Xylazine Use

# Xylazine Basics: What is Xylazine?

- Xylazine, also known as tranq or tranq-dope, is a non-opioid, unscheduled veterinary tranquilizer that is used as an additive in the illicit drug supply.
- In veterinary medicine, xylazine is used as a sedative, pain reliever, and muscle relaxant for animals.
- Xylazine is a clonidine analog, meaning it has similar properties to the prescription-only medication clonidine (which lowers blood pressure and heart rate and can decrease anxiety).
- Xylazine is not approved for use in humans and was found to be unsafe in brief human clinical trials.



# Xylazine Basics: Use as an Additive

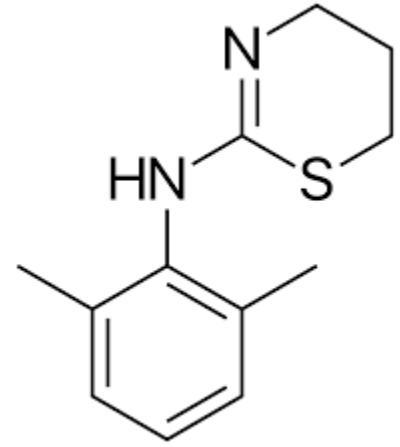
- Xylazine is added to the drug supply because it is cheap and easy to obtain, and because it enhances the sedative effect of other substances.
- Xylazine is most commonly added to heroin and fentanyl-containing products, though it has also been reported in other drugs, including cocaine.
- Many people use Xylazine inadvertently or unknowingly because it is added to other drugs.



# Xylazine Basics: Impact of Use

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- Xylazine use causes sedation, which can be significant and last for several hours
- When used with other sedating substances (e.g. fentanyl, heroin, benzodiazepines), xylazine appears to increase the chance of a fatal overdose
- Xylazine does not respond to Narcan
- People who are overly sedated are also at risk for falls, injury from not moving for extended periods, theft, and assault
- Xylazine use is associated with significant wounds that most often appear on the forearms and lower legs



# Xylazine Fact and Fiction

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- Addressing Misinformation About Xylazine and Xylazine Use

# Xylazine Supply Fact and Fiction

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## Myth:

- Many people who have not used xylazine before are actively seeking it out



**Myth vs Reality**

## Reality:

- Many people start using xylazine inadvertently due to tainted supply and end up seeking the drug only after they have developed a dependence. Most people want to avoid a tainted supply.



# Xylazine Impact Fact and Fiction

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## Myth:

- Xylazine is causing people to become “zombies.”



**Myth vs Reality**

## Reality:

- Xylazine is a sedative and it can cause significant sedation, especially because people don't know how much they are taking. People need support and education to protect themselves and recognize the signs of overdose or oversedation.

# Xylazine Wounds Fact and Fiction

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## Myth:

- Wounds caused by xylazine cannot be healed and inevitably lead to amputation.



**Myth vs Reality**

## Reality:

- Xylazine-related wounds can be significant and look alarming, however these wounds can be healed with access to consistent wound care. Wounds can heal regardless of whether people continue to use or not.

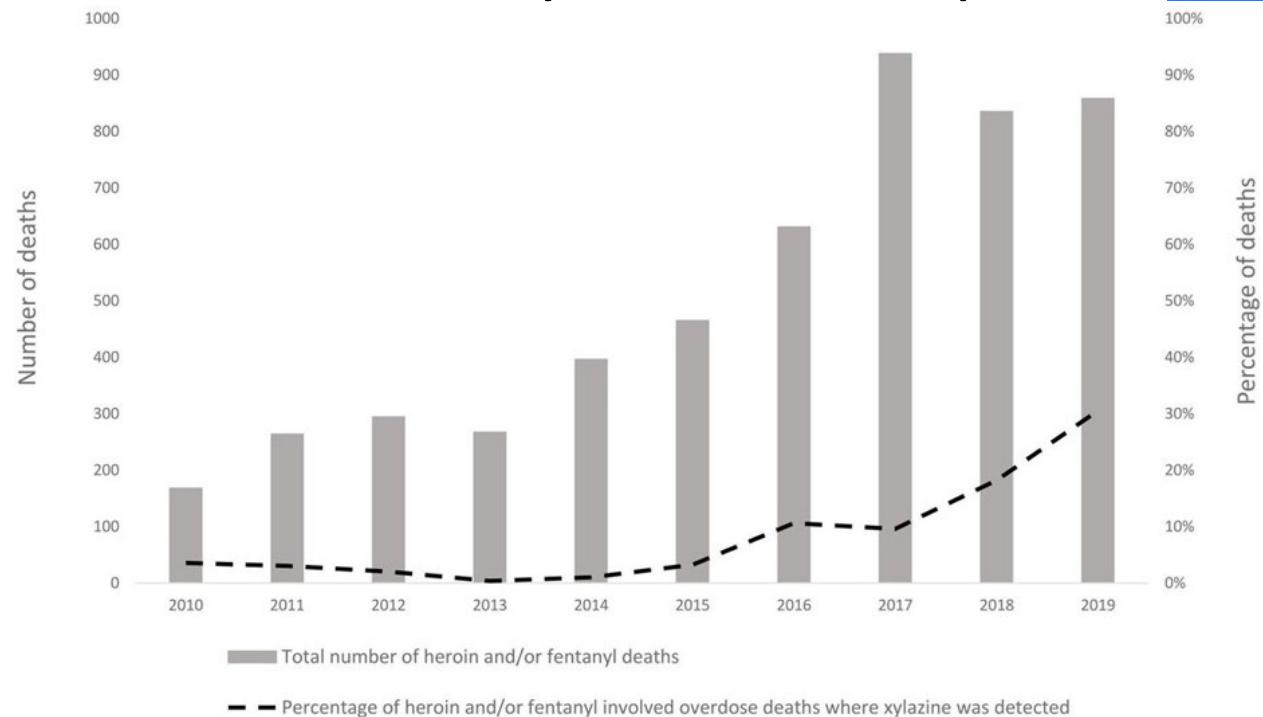
# Xylazine in Philadelphia

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- Xylazine in Puerto Rico - beginning in 2000's
- Xylazine in Philadelphia - Widespread starting in 2016/2017
- Spread Across U.S. - 2020 on

# Xylazine in Philadelphia

- First appeared in drug supply prior to 2010, rapidly increased starting in 2016
- Xylazine present in 91% of fentanyl/heroin samples in [2021](#)



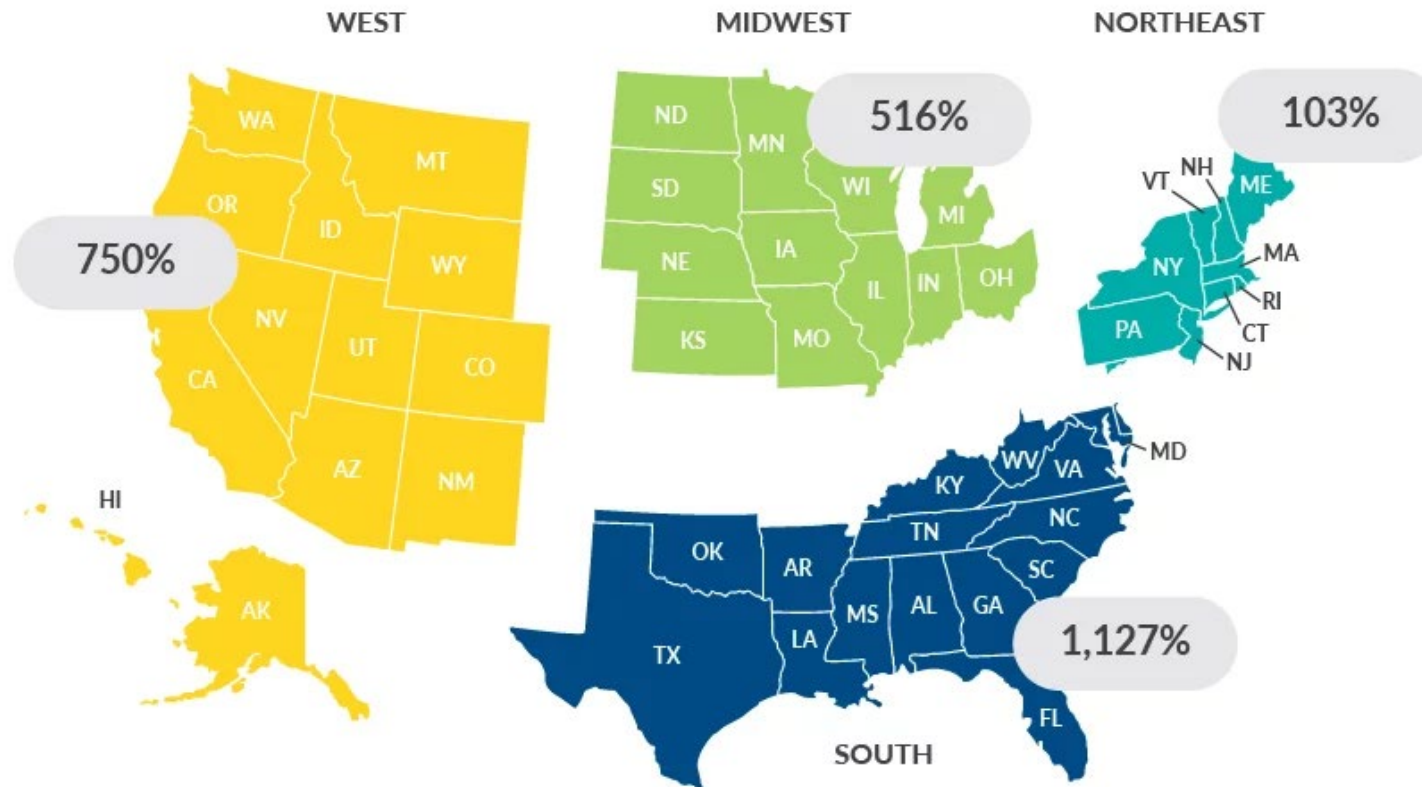
# Xylazine in Philadelphia

- Philadelphia providers are addressing the following areas of need:
  - Community education
  - Overdose response
  - Outpatient treatment
  - Inpatient treatment and withdrawal management
  - Wound care
  - Drug testing



# Xylazine in the U.S.

- The number of xylazine-positive overdose deaths increased across the U.S. from 2020 to 2021, most notably in the South.



# Responding to Overdose With Xylazine in the Drug Supply

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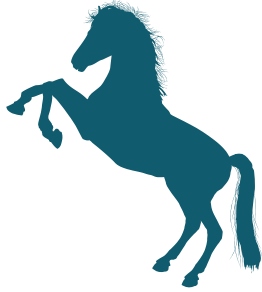
- Special Considerations with Xylazine in the Supply
- Responding to a Suspected Overdose



# SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS ON TRANQ



## TRANQ



Xylazine, also known as “tranq,” is a horse tranquilizer found in most bags of dope in the Kensington section of Philadelphia and has spread to almost every state in the US.



Tranq is NOT an opioid and **Narcan** has no effect on it.



Someone who uses tranq will often be heavily sedated for up to several hours.



# DOPE, COKE, CRANK, TRANQ

In a medical emergency, rarely do we know what combinations of drugs a person may or may not have used.

No matter what, we must always:

- Stay safe
- Call 911 if unresponsive
- Control life-threatening bleeding
- Protect the head, neck, and spine
- Make sure they have an open airway
- Support their breathing
- Begin CPR if you cannot find a pulse within 10 seconds and use AED when available
- Give naloxone if you suspect opioid overdose





# Suspected Opioid Overdose

Stimulation

Call 911

Administer naloxone\*

Resuscitation

Evaluate



*\*Picture of an actor simulating an overdose.*

\*DO NOT DELAY CARE FOR CARDIAC ARREST OR RESPIRATORY FAILURE  
FOR MORE THAN 10 SECONDS



# A.V.P.U.

Alert

Verbal Stimuli

Painful Stimuli

Unresponsive



# Opioid Overdose VS Xylazine Sedation

When a person who has an elevated tolerance to Fentanyl uses tranq dope (Fentanyl + Xylazine), it can be very likely that they did not use enough Fentanyl to cause an opioid overdose, but it was enough Xylazine to heavily sedate them for several hours.



## Opioid Overdose VS Xylazine Sedation: Cont.

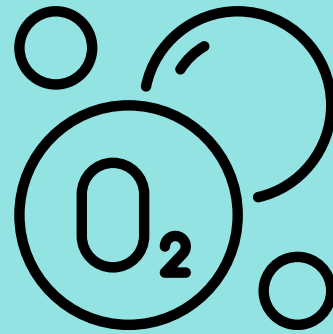
At first glance, this can appear like an opioid overdose. But in this case, their breathing and oxygen saturation should be close to normal. Additionally, if it is not an actual opioid overdose, we should be able to elicit some visible response when applying painful stimulation.

# Opioid Overdose VS Xylazine Sedation: Signs

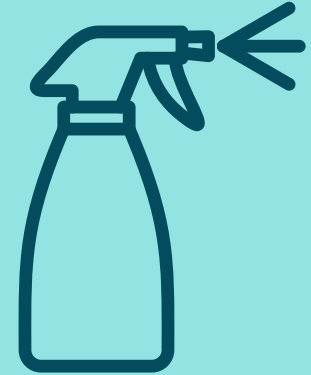


## TRANQ

The signs of tranq use seem similar to an opioid overdose, but:



Typically, the person's Respiratory Rate and oxygen saturation levels are near normal, unlike an opioid overdose.



Someone who has used tranq will usually respond to painful stimuli and other interventions such as squirting their forehead or back of the neck with a jet of water.

Just don't let it get in their nose or mouth.





# Airway, Breathing, Circulation (A,B,Cs)



## Check for open airway, breathing, and pulse

- ✓ Tilt their head back and open their mouth to open their airway.
- ✓ Carefully remove any foreign objects in their mouth.
- ✓ Look for rise and fall of their chest and what sounds they make.
- ✓ Simultaneously check to see if they have a pulse.



## Airway, Breathing, Circulation (A,B,Cs): Cont.



### Check for open airway, breathing, and pulse

- ✓ If you cannot find their pulse in 10 seconds, ask for an AED and **BEGIN CPR IMMEDIATELY.**
- ✓ If they have a pulse but are not breathing, begin rescue breathing only.
- ✓ If they have a pulse and are breathing, roll them into the recovery position.
- ✓ **ALWAYS FOLLOW YOUR LOCAL PROTOCOLS & PROCEDURES.**



# Vital Signs

✓ Respiratory Rate

✓ Blood Oxygen Saturation

✓ Heart Rate

✓ Pupils

✓ Skin

✓ Blood Pressure

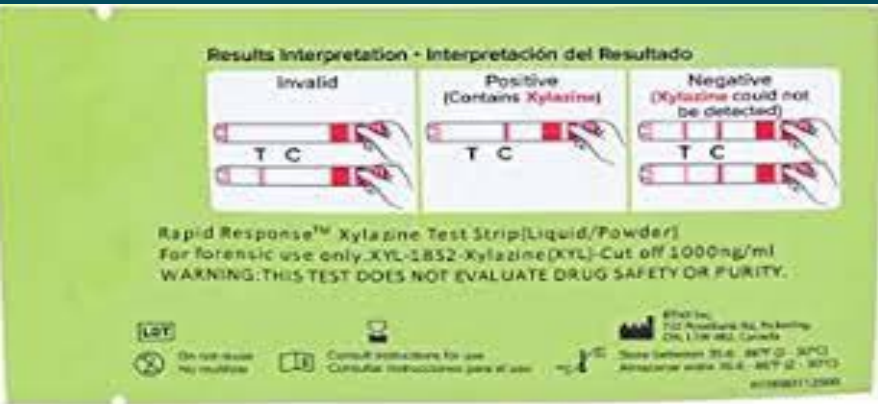
# Harm Reduction Approaches

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- Xylazine Test Strips
- Health Care and Hospitalization
- Withdrawal Support



# Xylazine Test Strips



## Fentanyl Test Strips

1. Add sterile water to your **empty** baggie or the **cooker you just prepped** – mix well!  
\*\*Load your shot **FIRST!** Only test your rinse water!
2. **Dip the test strip** in the water, in up to the first line & **hold for 15 seconds**
3. **Place test strip** on sterile surface or across top of cooker.



**One line POSITIVE**



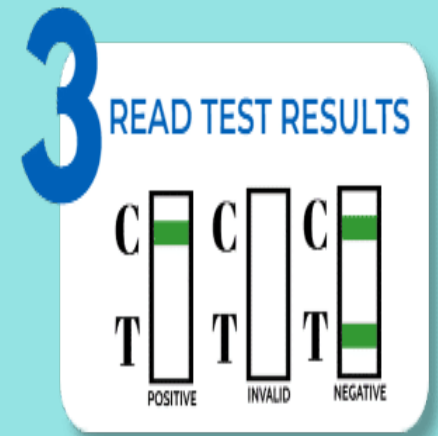
**Two lines NEGATIVE**



Positive Negative



Trystereo New Orleans Harm Reduction Network



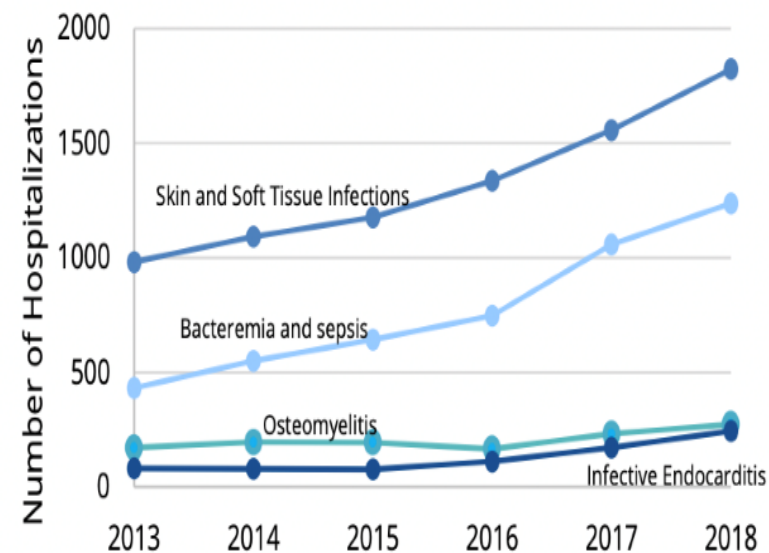
## Health Care and Hospitalization

- Hospitalizations continue to increase related to soft tissue infections
- Complex and challenging to care for due to continued injection into the wound and surrounding tissues, inappropriate topical care and interventions by patients, refusal to access healthcare services
- Need prompt, consistent and appropriate care to promote healing and decrease chances of limb loss/disability
- Trauma-informed, harm reduction approach to wound care discharges and admissions is needed

### Hospitalizations for Bacterial Infections Related to Injection Drug Use Are Increasing

\*Infections are not mutually exclusive; someone may be hospitalized for multiple bacterial infections at one time

Hospitalizations for Infections Related to Injection Drug Use Among People who use Drugs, 2013-2018



- Between 2013 and 2018, the number of hospitalizations for skin and soft tissue infections, osteomyelitis, bacteremia and sepsis, and infective endocarditis among people who use drugs increased by 91%, 73%, 253%, and 240%, respectively.
- Hospitalizations for bacterial infections among people who do not use drugs did not see similar increases between 2013 and 2018 (data not shown).

Source: Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council, 2013-2018

# Withdrawal Support

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- Because xylazine is a sedative, withdrawal symptoms can include panic, anxiety, agitation, and emotional unease.
- Withdrawal support most often focuses on addressing acute anxiety, which can last several days to weeks based on anecdotal reports.
- Removal of xylazine can also result in increased blood pressure and heart rate.
- It is important for inpatient hospital staff to know that xylazine withdrawal is a possibility and that someone might need support.





# Supporting Wound Care Needs

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- Understanding Xylazine-Related Wounds
- Talking About Wounds
- Basic Care and Referrals

# Understanding Xylazine-Related Wounds

- The use of xylazine has been associated with significant wounds that are characterized by substantial tissue death (necrosis).
- The wounds are not necessarily associated with injection sites and can also be seen with smoking or snorting xylazine-containing drugs.
- The wounds most commonly occur on the extremities – particularly on the forearms and lower legs.
- The wounds often start as several small, circular lesions that can merge to form large, full-thickness (down to fat and muscle) wounds
- Wounds can become quite large and have extensive drainage



# Advocacy/Harm Reduction for Wound Care

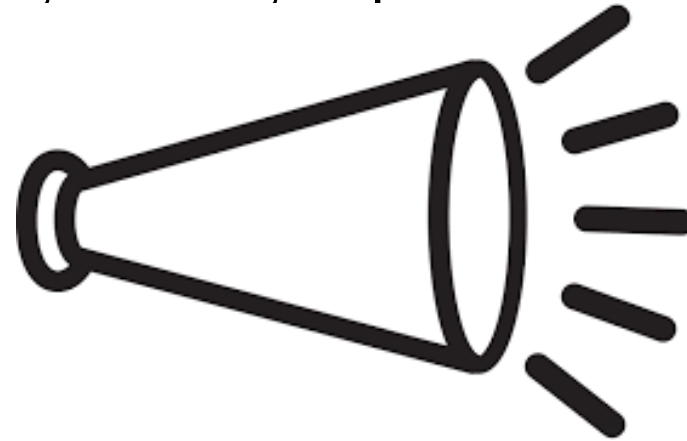
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- Tranq wounds can be quite extensive, (cover entire forearm) and have a lot of drainage
- Wounds can heal without skin grafts and/or amputations
- Encourage connection to Harm Reduction PCP provider and/or wound care provider
- Regular wound care follow-up is essential
- Wounds can take (upwards) of months to heal
- Be very cautious with any constrictive dressings (including conform)
- If possible encourage use of tubinet as an option to support patients who are still injecting into wounds

# Talking About Xylazine-Related Wounds

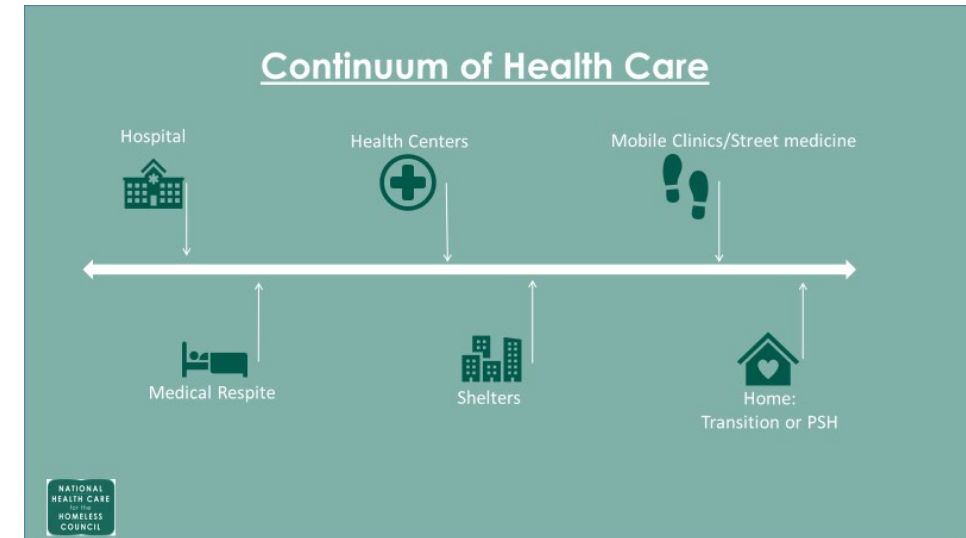
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- Anyone using fentanyl-containing products in particular should be aware of the potential for xylazine in the supply and the development of wounds
- People need to know that the wounds can worsen quickly and respond best when treated early
- People should not pick at the wounds or leave them open to the air/only covered with a sleeve, should avoid injecting into the wounds if possible, and should avoid harsh cleansers like bleach, alcohol, or peroxide



# Treatment and Referrals

- Refer anyone with a wound to medical care: street medicine/outreach team, community outpatient providers, or emergency care
- Regular access to care is important
- When in doubt: cleanse wound with saline or clean water and cover with a clean, non-adherent dressing
- Do not use specialty dressings without an order or if you don't know how the dressing works; this can worsen wounds and damage healthy tissue





# Evaluation and Certificate of Participation

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# Thank You!

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## Contact Us:

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