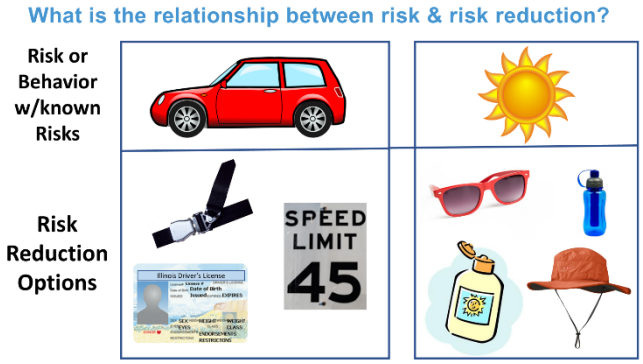
Center for Community Engagement at Chestnut Health Systems

Risk Reduction

Quick Reference Guide

"Harm is, simply, anything that happens, no matter what causes it, that damages any part of you, your life, or those around you. Harm can be physical, emotional, social, or, some would say, spiritual." --Patt Denning, Psychotherapist

Risk Reduction includes policies, practices, and strategies that help to reduce risk or the negative effects of something or some behavior that has a certain amount of risk associated with it.



There is a certain amount of risk people willingly take when driving a car and spending time in the sun. When driving or riding in a car, risk can come from many ways including traffic accidents, reckless driving, and excessive speed. When it comes to the sun, risk can come from too much sun exposure and too much heat. The answer isn't to eliminate the use of cars or abstain from sunlight, the better answer is to engage in some form of risk reduction.

When it comes to alcohol and drug use, many people think in terms of risk elimination, or believe complete abstinence is the only option. That is like telling someone who was in a car accident or received a speeding ticket that they should never drive a car again. Or because someone was sun burned or became overheated that they should always abstain from being outdoors when it's sunny. The good news is there are tools to reduce risk for all of these behaviors that have known risks.

The idea of risk reduction is not to eliminate substance use or misuse. It is to reduce the harmful effects of behaviors with known risks.



Risk reduction strategies fall into four primary areas:

Education, which includes information, knowledge, and the application of that knowledge. This strategy can look like peers in recovery educating people who are actively using or in early recovery. It can be education on how to prevent overdoses, and how to reduce risk in many areas.

Many risk reduction tools are not readily available to people who use drugs. Providing **access** to tools such as syringes, naloxone, and safe consumption sites and bringing care to the person through mobile health all increase access.

Support, a key attribute of risk reduction, is the concept of help with low or no barriers to care. Support provides options that have minimum requirements for participation and normally address

basic health and social needs of people who use drugs. This may include primary health care, housing, homeless services, medications, and social, cultural and faith-based support.

The fourth area is the ability to **link** individuals to needed services. This may include medical services such as HIV and HEP C testing and addiction and mental health treatment referrals.

We need all four areas to optimize impact of services as they are all interconnected.

What are the benefits of Risk Reduction?

Risk reduction approaches lead to safer use, moderation, or abstinence—depending on the individual's desires and needs. Because the focus is on improving quality of life, any step that reduces risk to individuals, their loved ones, their community, and society – is embraced and celebrated.

Risk reduction is simply making any positive change possible.

- Risk reduction efforts strengthen public safety by preventing disease transmission and injury which translates into less demand on those that provide medical services.
- It also generates healthcare cost savings, for $1-2 spent in Risk reduction, $5-7 in healthcare costs are saved.
- Risk reduction reduces public nuisance fears and concerns by offering safe places to use drugs and safe disposal of syringes and other supplies.
- Provides multiple entry points for people into helpful services which includes treatment, and develops meaningful partnerships between community groups, public health and public safety groups, and business groups.

How can I reduce stigma around Risk Reduction?

Stigma, which includes the stereotypes and judgments that often prevent people who use substances from seeking help, is common when a community begins thinking about supporting risk reduction efforts. Stigma limits the potential positive impact of the four risk reduction strategies. In other words, the individuals who need education, access, support and linkages to services are denied these opportunities due to the judgements and lack of acceptance by others.

The best thing you can do is to learn more about risk reduction and addiction. To learn more about substance use disorder stigma, please visit the Chestnut Health Systems Stigma Toolkit.

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