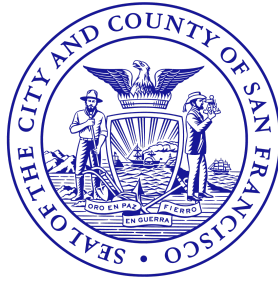


City and County
of San Francisco



Board of Supervisors
Member, District 6

MATT DORSEY

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NEWS RELEASE

‘Recovery First’ wins growing support on the day of a key Board of Supervisors vote

Long-term recovery from Substance Use Disorder — ‘free from illicit drug use,’ through the process of recovery — could be enshrined as S.F.’s primary goal

SAN FRANCISCO (May 6, 2025) — In a legislative battle that has drawn national opposition from the New York-based drug-decriminalization advocacy organization, the Drug Policy Alliance, and several of its locally allied harm-reduction nonprofits, Supervisor Matt Dorsey today announced mounting consensus behind his “Recovery First” legislation as it faces a critical vote on first reading at the San Francisco Board of Supervisors later today.

Dorsey’s proposed ordinance would define “remission” from substance use disorder as “living a self-directed and healthy life, free from illicit drug use,” and enshrine long-term remission through the process of recovery as San Francisco’s primary substance use disorder policy goal. Amended in committee on April 24 to adopt recommendations to win the formal endorsement of the San Francisco Marin Medical Society, Dorsey’s legislation is believed to be the first of its kind in the nation.

“Only by aligning our civic aspiration with what any of us would wish for a loved one struggling with addiction can San Francisco claim a drug policy worthy of the City of Saint Francis,” said Supervisor **Matt Dorsey**, who has publicly acknowledged his own journey in recovery from drug addiction. “If enacted, the ‘Recovery First’ ordinance will establish that

helping those with Substance Use Disorders live a self-directed, healthy life — free from illicit drug use — is the primary goal San Franciscans share with our city agencies and taxpayer-funded contractors. This is exactly the kind of public policy ‘North Star’ San Francisco needs to earn public confidence in our approach to the drug crisis we face, and to begin making needed progress to reverse the multitude of harms posed by synthetic drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine.”

The backing of the San Francisco Marin Medical Society means Dorsey’s proposed Recovery First legislation has the endorsement of the professional association representing more than 3,000 physicians, medical students, residents and fellows in all modes of practice and specialties in San Francisco and Marin Counties.

In addition, Dorsey’s office today announced a growing list of supporters that include:

- San Francisco Fire Fighters Local 798;
- The Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions;
- United Playaz;
- Brothers Against Drug Deaths;
- San Francisco Police Officers Association; and
- Drug-Free Sidewalks.

Individual supporters of Recovery First from the public health advocacy and recovery communities include: Steve Adami, Richard Beal, Dr. Stanton Glantz, Dr. Keith Humphreys, Dr. John Maa, former Supervisor Bill Maher, Destiny Pletsch, Del Seymour, Dr. Laurence Brett Wiener, and Tom Wolf.

Organizational Endorsers

“As the labor organization representing the men and women on the front lines of San Francisco’s emergency response to our drug overdose crisis, Local 798 proudly supports the ‘Recovery First’ legislation,” said **Alec Kauf**, president of **San Francisco Fire Fighters Local 798**. “The emergency medical responders and firefighters we represent work tirelessly every day, doing their part to reverse overdoses and save lives. But we need every city agency and contractor to do their part, too — by helping those struggling with deadly addictions live a self-directed and healthy life, free from illicit drug use. It’s the solutions-oriented approach San Francisco needs.”

“The Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions is proud to support San Francisco’s enactment of the proposed ‘Recovery First’ ordinance,” said **Kevin A. Sabet**, Co-Founder and CEO of the **Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions**. “As major cities worldwide grapple with the new and unique challenges posed by synthetic drugs like fentanyl, San Francisco has a chance to lead the way with a humane and aspirational policy directive — endorsed by its regional medical society — to provide a clear and unifying North Star that makes a healthy and drug-free life as its primary goal. We applaud San Francisco for its leadership, and we urge the passage of this ‘Recovery First’ legislation.”

“At United Playaz, we always say, ‘It takes the hood to save the hood,’ which means we believe in solutions that combine compassion, accountability, and real resources,” wrote **Rudy Corpuz, Jr.**, founder and director of **United Playaz**, a San Francisco-based violence prevention and youth development organization. “Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ ordinance is exactly that: a policy that brings together our city’s health system, treatment providers, and public safety agencies with a common goal of helping people truly recover. It also rightly recognizes that San Francisco’s biggest barrier right now is not a lack of will, but a lack of treatment facilities, staff, and resources. We stand with the San Francisco Marin Medical Society, Supervisor Dorsey and his co-sponsors in calling for investment in the beds, services, and trained professionals our community desperately needs.”

“As police officers who confront the unprecedented harms of San Francisco’s drug crisis all day, every day, we share Supervisor Dorsey’s belief that city policy should aspire to more than just safer drug use — it’s time to put ‘Recovery First,’” said **Tracy McCray**, President of the **San Francisco Police Officers Association**. “We’re proud to stand with doctors, public health professionals, members of the recovery community, and so many others to support the passage of ‘Recovery First.’ It’s the worthy drug policy goal San Francisco needs.”

“The ‘Recovery First’ Ordinance will provide long-overdue policy direction to disparate approaches of our city government and nonprofit contractors, which too often work at cross-purposes,” said **Lanier Coles**, President of **Drug-Free Sidewalks**, a public advocacy organization to end public drug use in San Francisco. “We welcome Supervisor Dorsey’s legislation to prioritize long-term recovery, which is consistent with Drug-Free Sidewalk’s mission. It will enshrine living a self-directed and healthy life, free from illicit drug use, as the primary policy goal of San Francisco’s substance use disorder policy.”

“Brothers Against Drug Deaths proudly supports Supervisor Matt Dorsey’s Recovery First legislation,” said **Theris L. Coats, Sr.**, co-founder and CEO of **Brothers Against Drug Deaths**, or BADD, at <https://www.badd-sf.org/>, a new nonprofit organization that advocates for those battling addiction and mental illness in the Black and other underserved communities. “Together with Assemblymember Matt Haney’s Assembly Bill 255, these efforts represent important progress to expand opportunities for a healthy drug-free life and prioritizing treatment over incarceration. We stand for recovery, dignity, and second chances.”

“ConnectedSF is proud to support Supervisor Dorsey’s Recovery First legislation,” said **Marie Hurabiell**, executive director of **ConnectedSF**. “This ordinance is an essential first step toward a more realistic and humane approach to San Francisco’s drug policies. This ordinance signals a dramatic shift in the right direction — acknowledging both the urgency of the crisis and the need for accountability. We must end drug use on our streets and in city- and state-funded housing. Additionally, we urge city leaders to set clear boundaries around harm reduction practices — particularly regarding the distribution of drug paraphernalia by nonprofits, whether on the street or within non-profit facilities. This is a pivotal moment for San Francisco, and we stand ready to support policies that prioritize public health, safety, and recovery.”

“The San Francisco Marin Medical Society (SFMMS) is pleased to support Supervisor Dorsey’s measure to create an aspirational goal of long-term remission for individuals battling substance use disorder,” said **SFMMS President Jason Nau, M.D.** “Recovery is often a non-linear process of self-actualization where harm reduction efforts, abstinence, and treatment are not in opposition with one another or mutually exclusive. If properly provided, they are all complementary components of optimal substance use disorder systems. What gets lost in this debate is that the biggest obstacle to recovery and remission facing San Franciscans with substance use disorder is the severe lack of facilities and staff necessary to provide robust behavioral health services, without which none of these strategies will be effective.”

Public Health and Recovery Community Leaders

“For too long, a ‘harm-reduction-first’ approach has shaped San Francisco’s drug policy and addiction response, yet our city’s drug and overdose crisis continues to spiral out of control,” said **Steve Adami**, Executive Director of **The Way Out**, a recovery-focused homeless initiative of The Salvation Army. “It’s time for a bold shift, one that puts recovery at the heart of our

response. By prioritizing long-term recovery — free of illicit drugs — expanding access to treatment, and creating real pathways to sobriety and independence, we can offer people more than survival, we can help them rebuild their lives. It's time to invest in solutions that help people overcome addiction, not perpetuate it. Supervisor Dorsey's 'Recovery First' ordinance marks a pivotal moment for San Francisco by making recovery the foundation of our city's drug policy."

"Without a clearly defined goal, even the most well-intentioned services can lose direction — and that's exactly what's happened with San Francisco's drug policy," said **Cedric Akbar**, a behavioral health specialist and program director at Positive Directions Equals Change. "The 'Recovery First' ordinance offers a clear and humane path forward. It centers long-term drug-free living as the primary goal, and that's the kind of leadership and accountability our city urgently needs."

"We must end drug tourism and bring back an atmosphere of recovery to San Francisco," said **Richard Beal**, Director of Recovery Services for the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. "'Recovery First' is needed for those struggling with drug addiction. Thank you, Supervisor Matt Dorsey, for championing this much needed ordinance!"

"I'm proud to stand with other leaders of San Francisco's medical community in support of Supervisor Dorsey's 'Recovery First' ordinance, and I'm grateful to him for having the courage to push for real change," said **Dr. Anthony DiGiorgio**, a UCSF neurosurgeon and public health advocate. "For too long, San Francisco's drug policy clung to the fantasy that enabling addiction was compassionate. It was not. It was cruelty dressed up as virtue. I saw the consequences firsthand, day after day, covering neuro trauma in the ER. We are finally moving back toward common sense and putting recovery over ruin."

"Just as smoke-free laws helped to change social norms around tobacco and supported millions in quitting, the 'Recovery First' ordinance can do the same for drug policy," said **Dr. Stanton Glantz**, retired UCSF Professor of Medicine and founding director of the UCSF Center for Tobacco Control Research and Education. "By clearly defining the goal as freedom from the grip of drug addiction, this ordinance lays the groundwork for a healthier, more supportive environment for people seeking to reclaim their lives. It deserves broad support."

“Just as we aim for the best possible outcome for San Franciscans who experience less stigmatized disorders like cancer and heart disease, we should also aim for full recovery for those who experience addiction,” said **Keith Humphreys, Ph.D.**, a professor of psychiatry at Stanford University School of Medicine and former Senior White House Drug Policy Advisor to the Obama Administration. “I support the ‘Recovery First’ legislation because it would provide an important and necessary North Star for drug policy in San Francisco, which reflects compassionate optimism about the potential and dignity of every person who experiences addiction while simultaneously assuring the city’s taxpayers that the resources they provide are being wisely employed.”

“In my ten years of work, I have seen remission from substance use disorder, and Recovery First’s amended language gives me hope that all service providers can row in the same direction and help people suffering find the help they need to live meaningful, self-directed lives,” said **Billy Lemon**, executive director of the Castro Country Club, a sober community center serving San Francisco’s LGBTQ recovery community. “I am also of the opinion that abstinence is also harm reduction. I say that as a person in Recovery that needed the gentle nudge, not a mandate to quit. Recovery First, in the form I currently understand, seems like compassionate accountability. We look forward to continuing talks that further the reach of city services to help our resident neighbors find the help they need.”

“I applaud the leadership of Supervisor Dorsey and the San Francisco Board Supervisors to elevate the vision, direction and focus of the City’s efforts to address substance addiction,” said **Dr. John Maa**, a general surgeon and veteran public health advocate. “By making abstinence the overarching goal, this bold action will empower and uplift the City’s current harm reduction strategies to help save lives in San Francisco”

“The job of setting city policy belongs to our elected leaders — not to nonprofit contractors — and the ‘Recovery First’ Ordinance is exactly the kind of leadership City Hall needs to be providing,” said **former Supervisor Bill Maher**, San Francisco’s first self-identified recovering addict and a founding member of Delancey Street Foundation, a leading national residential self-help organization for the recovery and reentry communities. “This is the approach we need for the new and deadlier synthetic drugs out there today. It has my full support.”

“Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ policy strengthens San Francisco’s commitment to ending drug enablist,” said **Destiny Pletsch**, Deputy Director of The Salvation Army’s

recovery-focused homeless initiative, The Way Out. “To date, city policies and efforts have normalized addiction. Living drug-free and being in recovery should not be controversial, and our systems should be designed to give people back their lives. By uniting the city and its contracted partners under a shared mission, we can take a bold, solutions-focused approach to the drug and overdose crisis — investing in strategies that empower individuals to break free from addiction and reclaim their health, stability, and independence.”

“I am proud to share my 15-year recovery journey with folks like Matt Dorsey,” said **Del Seymour**, a longtime community leader and founder of Tenderloin Blackness. “Having a drug-free life should be the goal of all of the community. It also should be the priority for the city’s care of its residents. To me, it’s not how you get there — but that you get there. I’m proud to stand alongside the San Francisco Marin Medical Society and countless recovery community members to support the ‘Recovery First’ ordinance, and I applaud Mayor Lurie, Supervisor Dorsey and all of his Board of Supervisors’ co-sponsors for moving this legislation forward.”

“As a physician who administered fentanyl under tightly controlled conditions — and as a father who’s seen the pain of addiction up close — I know both the science and the stakes,” said **Dr. Laurence Brett Wiener**, a retired anesthesiologist and Yerba Buena District resident. “Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ ordinance is a humane, evidence-based course correction. It puts long-term recovery at the center of drug policy — and that’s how we begin to restore both compassion and accountability to San Francisco.”

“For too long, San Francisco has utilized an unclear set of piecemeal drug policies to mitigate the drug crisis,” said **Tom Wolf**, recovery advocate and Director of West Coast Initiatives at the Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions. “Having a unifying message of ‘Recovery First’ not only sets the bar higher, but clearly defines that our public health approach is to promote recovery from addictions. ‘Recovery First’ not only saves lives, it transforms them for the better.”

Conclusion

Dorsey proposed the “Recovery First” legislation last February to better align city agencies and contractors with a unifying policy directive that centers recovery free from illicit drug use as its goal. Currently co-sponsored by Board President Rafael Mandelman and Supervisors Bilal Mahmood, Stephen Sherrill, Myrna Melgar, Joel Engardio, and Danny Sauter, it is Item 29 on today’s [Board of Supervisors agenda](#).

Today's full board meeting begins at 2:00 p.m. The legislation and related documents are available on Legistar for [File No. 250190](#).

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For immediate release:

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Contact: BRYAN DAHL

Bryan.Dahl@sfgov.org

+1 (415) 554-7969 w

+1 (650) 465-4358 c

[Administrative Code - Recovery First ~~Drug~~Substance Use Disorder Treatment Policy]

Ordinance amending the Administrative Code to establish the ~~cessation of illicit drug use and attainment of long-term recovery from~~long-term remission of substance use disorders for individuals as the primary ~~objective~~goal of the City's ~~drug~~substance use disorder treatment policy.

NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.
Additions to Codes are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
Deletions to Codes are in *strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*.
Board amendment additions are in double-underlined Arial font.
Board amendment deletions are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
Asterisks (* * * *) indicate the omission of unchanged Code subsections or parts of tables.

Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

Section 1. Chapter 15 of the Administrative Code is hereby amended by adding Section 15.19, to read as follows:

SEC. 15.19. RECOVERY FIRST ~~DRUG~~SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER TREATMENT POLICY.

(a) **Title.** *This Section 15.19 shall be known as the “Recovery First ~~Drug~~Substance Use Disorder Treatment Policy.”*

(b) **Definitions.** *For purposes of this Section 15.19, the following terms have the following meanings:*

(1) **“Remission” means overcoming the illness of Substance Use Disorder to the point of living a self-directed and healthy life, free from illicit drug use.**

(42) “Recovery” means the process by which an individual suffering from Substance Use Disorder strives to make positive changes that become part of a voluntarily adopted healthy lifestyle. Recovery ~~abstinence from illicit drugs, and shall~~ may include participation in; a Medication-Assisted-Treatment program administered by a qualified licensed healthcare provider in accordance with applicable laws and medical guidance; an outpatient or residential substance use treatment program; a contingency management program; or other program determined by the program participant to support their efforts to be in Remission.

(23) “Substance Use Disorder” has the meaning set forth in the 5th edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, as may be amended or revised from time to time.

(c) **Policy.** The cessation of illicit drug use and attainment of long-term Recovery from Long-term Remission of Substance Use Disorders for individuals, with the help of fully supported and staffed evidence-based Recovery and behavioral health services, shall be the primary objective goal of the City's drug Substance Use Disorder treatment policy.

Section 2. Effective Date. This ordinance shall become effective 30 days after enactment. Enactment occurs when the Mayor signs the ordinance, the Mayor returns the ordinance unsigned or does not sign the ordinance within ten days of receiving it, or the Board of Supervisors overrides the Mayor's veto of the ordinance.

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
DAVID CHIU, City Attorney

By: /s/
ANNE PEARSON
Deputy City Attorney

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