# Ohio nonprofit expands naloxone access to 35 major US music festivals amid shifting attitudes



Music festivals in the United States are increasingly becoming arenas for harm reduction strategies aimed at addressing rampant drug use, with both activists and nonprofits initiating vital interventions. Among these is "This Must Be the Place," an Ohio-based nonprofit founded by William Perry and Ingela Travers-Hayward in 2022. The organization has taken significant strides in providing free naloxone—an opioid overdose reversal medication—along with quick training sessions in under two minutes for festivalgoers. Their presence has expanded from a few cautious festivals in the Midwest to a robust involvement in 35 major U.S. festivals, including notable events such as Lollapalooza and Bonnaroo. This shift marks a significant cultural change, as just a few years ago, harm reduction measures were often met with skepticism and regulatory hurdles.

Advocates argue that music festivals are particularly suitable venues for harm reduction activities. Given the high incidence of drug usage in these environments, attempts to expand harm reduction efforts are gaining traction, though some festival organisers remain hesitant. The increased distribution of naloxone has been facilitated by the recent FDA approval of over-the-counter nasal sprays, likening accessibility now to that of aspirin. According to Daliah Heller, vice president of overdose prevention initiatives at Vital Strategies, the removal of prescription laws means that naloxone can be distributed more widely, drastically altering its availability at public events.

Last year, "This Must Be the Place" supplied over 46,000 units of Narcan. Emmett Beliveau, chief operating officer of C3 Presents, highlights that their collaboration with harm reduction nonprofits was motivated not by specific incidents within their festivals but rather a response to the alarming number of fatalities due to overdoses within communities. This growing awareness is further bolstered by peers taking initiative at festivals. Team Awareness Combating Overdose (TACO) has employed peer-led strategies to distribute naloxone and fentanyl test strips at events like Coachella. Their founder, Kameran Mody, emphasizes the importance of normalising conversations around drug usage, stating, "music and the use of drugs are synonymous with each other."

Despite new policies, the road to comprehensive harm reduction is still fraught with challenges, most notably in terms of legal ambiguity surrounding drug paraphernalia laws in various states. While Tennessee has decriminalised fentanyl test strips, many states maintain opaque regulations that complicate their distribution. However, some organizations circumvent these challenges by gaining informal approval from health departments to operate their initiatives. Yet, Mody observes that several festivals still grapple with the stigma of drug use, leading them to shy away from supporting harm reduction efforts publicly. This is evident in some cases where naloxone distribution is actively discouraged.

Internationally, more progressive harm reduction strategies are in play. A recent initiative in Mexico City, known as "Checa tu Sustancia" (Check Your Substance), provided attendees with free anonymous drug testing, allowing them to receive crucial information about their substances and their potential risks. Perry notes that while similar initiatives exist within the U.S., they often operate discreetly due to fears surrounding legal repercussions.

Looking to the future, Perry envisions dedicated harm reduction zones at festivals, which would provide a safe space for attendees who may require monitoring after using substances. Heller adds that the continuing destigmatization of drug use, alongside legal reforms to protect festival organizers from liability, are key components in advancing these much-needed safety measures.

As the intersection of music culture and public health evolves, the growing acceptance of harm reduction is not just a response to an ongoing crisis but rather a critical re-evaluation of how festivals approach the realities of drug use in a social setting.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ohio-harm-reduction-new-york-midwest-tennessee-b2767230.html), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/279b347ae26b3e3891923eaa07fd08cd)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ohio-harm-reduction-new-york-midwest-tennessee-b2767230.html), [[6]](https://www.vitalstrategies.org/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/279b347ae26b3e3891923eaa07fd08cd), [[5]](https://www.c3presents.com/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ohio-harm-reduction-new-york-midwest-tennessee-b2767230.html), [[4]](https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanylteststrips.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/279b347ae26b3e3891923eaa07fd08cd), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/279b347ae26b3e3891923eaa07fd08cd)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.dancesafe.org/), [[7]](https://www.institutoriamx.org/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[3]](https://www.dancesafe.org/), [[4]](https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanylteststrips.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ohio-harm-reduction-new-york-midwest-tennessee-b2767230.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/279b347ae26b3e3891923eaa07fd08cd> - Music festivals across the U.S. are increasingly embracing harm reduction strategies to address widespread drug use. Organisations like 'This Must Be The Place,' founded in 2022, are leading the way by distributing free naloxone—an opioid overdose reversal drug—and providing quick training at major festivals like Lollapalooza and Bonnaroo. Since FDA approval in 2023 made naloxone available over the counter, distribution has surged, with 46,146 units handed out in 2024 alone. Some nonprofits, such as Team Awareness Combating Overdose (TACO), have adopted peer-led education and guerrilla distribution methods without festival endorsement, notably at Coachella. Despite growing support, efforts are hindered by lingering criminalisation of fentanyl test strips in some states, social stigma, and festival organisers' reluctance to acknowledge drug use. Outside the U.S., harm reduction efforts are more advanced, evidenced by Mexico City's 'Checa tu Sustancia' initiative offering anonymous drug testing. Advocates are calling for protected harm reduction zones at festivals and legal reforms to shield organisers from liability. The evolving intersection of music culture and public health continues to shape how festivals approach drug safety.
3. <https://www.dancesafe.org/> - DanceSafe is a Berkeley, California-based nonprofit organisation founded in 1998 by Emanuel Sferios. They have 17 local chapters in the US and Canada. DanceSafe volunteers set up tables at music festivals, raves, and other events to distribute non-biased educational literature focused on harm reduction for safe and responsible drug use, including testing kits so that users may obtain more information about the contents of their pills. They also offer on-site peer counselling, health and safety tools (condoms, water, earplugs) and patrols for events that assist in keeping patrons safe.
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanylteststrips.html> - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides information on fentanyl test strips, which are recommended as a low-cost means to help prevent drug overdoses. These test strips can detect fentanyl in pills, powders, or injectables, allowing users to make informed decisions and reduce the risk of accidental overdose. The CDC emphasizes the importance of harm reduction strategies, including the use of fentanyl test strips, to address the ongoing opioid crisis and save lives.
5. <https://www.c3presents.com/> - C3 Presents is a major U.S. festival operator, known for organising large-scale music events such as Lollapalooza, Governors Ball, and Besame Mucho. The company collaborates with harm reduction organisations like 'This Must Be The Place' to implement public-facing harm reduction strategies at their festivals. This partnership aims to address the number of fatalities occurring in communities and to provide attendees with access to life-saving resources like naloxone.
6. <https://www.vitalstrategies.org/> - Vital Strategies is a global public health nonprofit organisation that works to strengthen public health systems and address health challenges worldwide. Daliah Heller, Vice President of Overdose Prevention Initiatives at Vital Strategies, highlights the significance of over-the-counter naloxone availability in harm reduction efforts. She notes that with the FDA's approval of the first over-the-counter nasal spray in 2023, naloxone distribution has become more accessible, likening it to purchasing aspirin.
7. <https://www.institutoriamx.org/> - Instituto RIA is a Mexico-based drug policy research and advocacy organisation that spearheaded the 'Checa tu Sustancia' (Check Your Substance) initiative. This programme offers free, anonymous drug testing at music festivals, providing users with detailed information about the substances they consume, including risks, potential interactions, and dosage adjustments. The initiative empowers individuals to make informed choices and promotes harm reduction practices within the festival environment.