

RESOURCE GUIDE

When a State Treats Drug Addiction Like a Health Issue, Not a Crime



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70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story

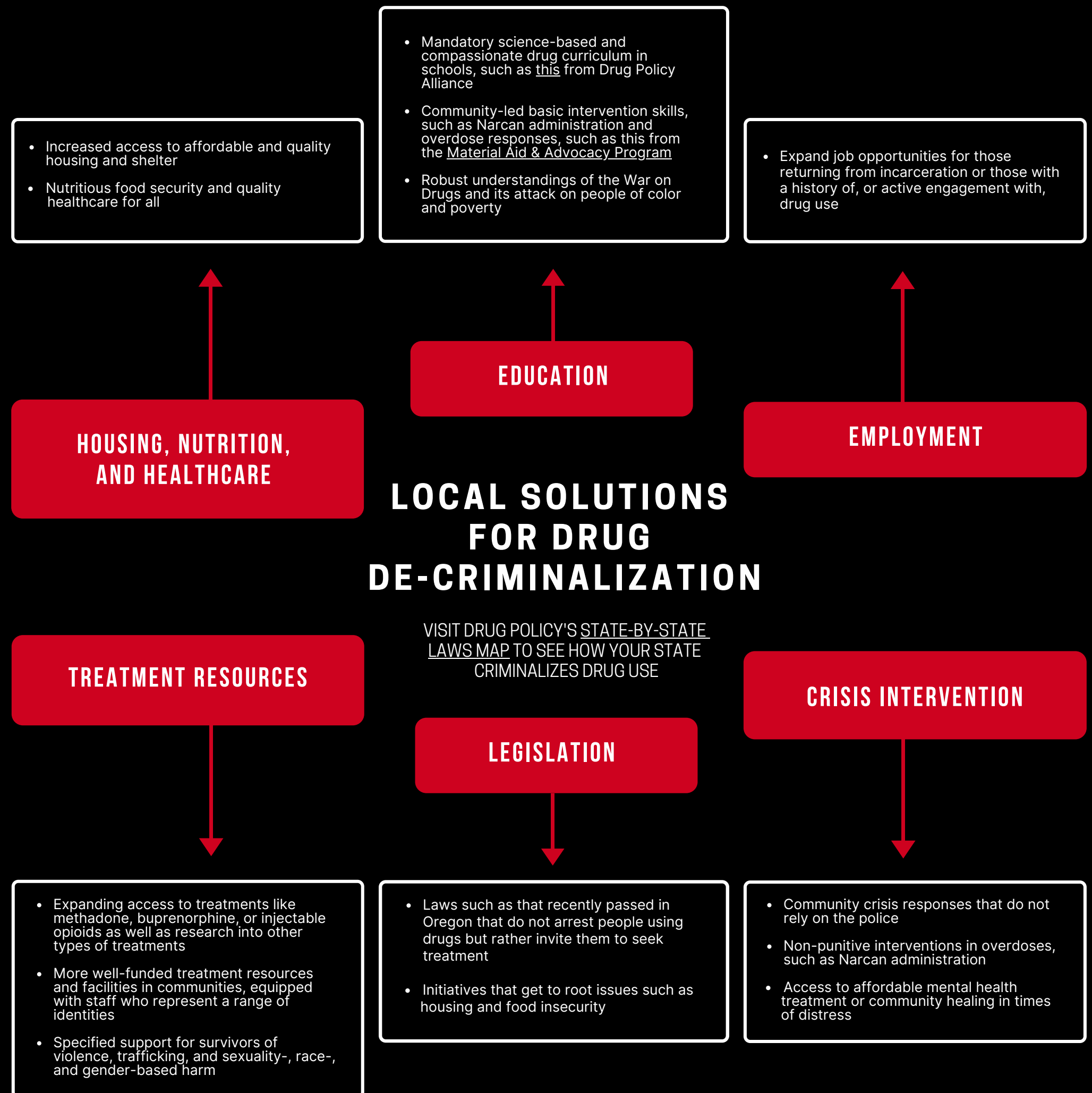
The Fight for Drug Decriminalization

In November 2020, Oregon voted on and passed a measure to decriminalize all drugs in the state. It went into effect February 1, 2021. It's the first state in the country to pass a decriminalization measure of this magnitude. Now, if someone is caught in possession of small amounts of any hard drug, whether it's heroin, meth or cocaine, they will get a citation, something similar to a traffic violation, instead of being arrested. They are then required to either pay a \$100 fine or complete a health assessment over the phone. This law is an attempt to undo the criminalization of drug addiction in the state and do away with coerced drug treatment programs that have historically been used in conjunction with the criminal legal system. Instead, people are given the choice to seek treatment. Treatment and recovery centers are also getting some help from this measure to meet the growing demand they anticipate. Every year, the state is using part of its cannabis tax revenue to fund existing addiction and recovery centers across the state. The question is what kind of impact the measure is having so far—are more people seeking treatment now as a result of this measure? Or will overdose rates skyrocket as some of the measure's opponents fear?

This is coming at a moment when the country is still entrenched in a pandemic as well as a rising rate of overdoses. Nationwide, overdose deaths rose nearly 30% during the year 2020. Oregon saw a 70% increase in overdose deaths in March and April 2020 alone.

For decades, the U.S. has struggled with the prevalence of substance abuse disorders and addiction. Drug possession puts more people behind bars than any other offense in this country. Arrests for drug possession tower over other offenses in the U.S. And nearly half of those behind bars right now have been put there for drug-related convictions. We owe this in large part to the War on Drugs, which gave rise to a series of draconian laws that criminalized drug use in this country, and continue to do so today. Oregon has become the first state to tackle the impacts of the War on Drugs in a big way, by passing a law that seeks to treat people with substance use disorder like patients rather than criminals.

- Cecilia Brown, Episode Reporter



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

One of the big questions and concerns over drug decriminalization is whether people will seek treatment on their own when not forced to go, and if they do not go, whether overdose rates will rise. Do you know examples in your own life of people seeking treatment for their addictions without the incentive to avoid jail time or without being mandated by court-ordered treatment programs? What other steps can be taken to decriminalize drugs in this country and support those amidst or recovering from an addiction that does not involve incarcerating or punishing them?




A LARGE MEETING ROOM AND EVENT SPACE AT MIRACLES CLUB, WHERE DAILY NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS MEETINGS ARE HELD. PHOTO BY ALISHA JUCEVIC.

PEOPLE DOING THE WORK

"You know, the African American community has had a lot of oppression and you know, the trauma has been so great and still is. Which means there's a lot of distrust. And so people like to know that you really care for them and that you're really there for them."

– WIL JOHNSON, Miracles Club Mentor



MIRACLES CLUB MENTOR WIL JOHNSON IS PICTURED OUTSIDE MIRACLES CLUB IN PORTLAND, OREGON. PHOTO BY ALISHA JUCEVIC.

Drug Policy Alliance

"Our mission is to advance those policies and attitudes that best reduce the harms of both drug use and drug prohibition, and to promote the sovereignty of individuals over their minds and bodies."

Miracles Club

"Miracles Club Recovery Community Center offers a safe space for sober community events. We also offer a wide variety of program services with a focus on the African American recovery community. Miracles Club Apartments provides an alcohol and drug free living environment for individuals in recovery with at least 12 months of sobriety."

Health Justice Recovery Alliance

"The Alliance is the statewide advocacy coalition working to ensure that Oregon's new law is implemented fully and without delay, centering the needs of communities most harmed by the War on Drugs — Black, Latinx, Native and tribal communities."

DeCrimPovertyD.C.

"Through ongoing advocacy, we aim to replace carceral systems with harm reduction-oriented systems of care that promote the dignity, autonomy, and health of people who use drugs, sex workers, and other criminalized populations."

Honoring Individual Power and Strength (HIPS)

"HIPS promotes the health, rights, and dignity of individuals and communities impacted by sexual exchange and/or drug use due to choice, coercion, or circumstance. HIPS provides compassionate harm reduction services, advocacy, and community engagement that is respectful, non-judgmental, and affirms and honors individual power and agency."

"When I walk into a treatment center and there's nobody looking like me in there, I'm most likely not going to stay because I need someone who understands my culture, generational and historical trauma. "

- JULIA MINES, Executive Director of Miracles Club

Miracles Club

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Souiful
EATZ
971.325.7396

DESSERTS

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY
11:30AM-7:00PM

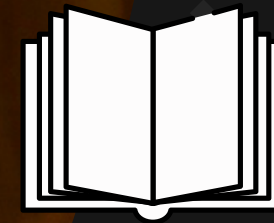
MIRACLES CLUB IS SEEN ON MARTIN LUTHER KING BLVD. IN PORTLAND, OREGON. FOUNDED IN 1993, THE CLUB EVOLVED FROM A VISION TO CREATE A SAFE AND SOBER ENVIRONMENT FOR PORTLAND'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY. PHOTO BY ALISHA JUCEVIC.

"Back in the War on Drugs, it was a legal issue. So, now that it's a health issue, can we get the treatment that we need to survive and change our lives."

– JULIA MINES, Executive Director of Miracles Club

KEEP LEARNING

Reading



[Drug Education Resources](#) from Drug Policy Alliance

[A Brief History of the Drug War](#) by Drug Policy Alliance

[More Imprisonment Does Not Reduce State Drug Problems](#) by PEW Research

[Public health alternatives to incarceration for drug offenders](#) by Nicholas Clark, Kate Dolan, and David Farabee

[Ending the War on Drugs: By the Numbers](#) by the Center for American Progress

[What our simulation models project will happen after Boston dismantles Mass. and Cass encampments](#) by Benjamin Linas and Joshua Barocas

Audio



[DPA Podcast Episode 41: Portland Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty Talks All Drug Decriminalization and Alternatives to Policing](#)

Film



[The House I Live In: The American War on Drugs](#)

MIRACLES CLUB
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JULIA MINES IS
PICTURED OUTSIDE THE
CLUB IN PORTLAND,
OREGON. PHOTO BY
ALISHA JUCEVIC.

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