

MEMO

TO: Honorable Members of the Boston City Council and Residents of Boston
FROM: City of Boston's Coordinated Response Team
DATE: September 3, 2025
RE: Update on Ongoing Efforts to End Congregate Substance Use in Boston

As residents and small businesses continue to work with the City to address the serious impacts on public safety, quality of life, and business sustainability stemming from outdoor substance use and addiction, we are writing to share some updates on the City's coordinated response.

Open substance use in any part of Boston is illegal and unacceptable. As we have built up a coordinated citywide response to shut down encampments, decrease overdose mortality, and continue to strengthen the continuum of care, our focus is now on ending outdoor substance use in Boston and the criminal activity that supports it.

Our plan combines continuous enforcement with direct pathways to divert individuals into treatment and away from the area through voluntary access, judicial diversion, and compulsory sectioning. Our efforts target the drug use, drug dealing, and congregation at the core of our public safety and quality of life challenges.

The Boston Police Department (BPD), Coordinated Response Team (CRT), and Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) have been taking ongoing steps guided by community feedback. As we enter the fall, we write to share some important updates on [the plan shared in February](#):

As noted in previous communications, this is a point-in-time update, as the City's plans and actions must continually address the evolving challenges and specific conditions in each area. We will continue to work closely with residents and business owners in impacted neighborhoods to refine strategies, target efforts, and respond to changing circumstances on the ground.

Public Safety Strategic Updates:

In the February 2025 memo, the Boston Police Department (BPD) outlined the following key strategies:

- Increased deployments and coordination in the broader Mass and Cass area and other congregate sites, with supervision from the Bureau of Field Services (BFS)
- Expanded Street Outreach Unit coverage and focus to enable successful Section 12s and Section 35s (involuntary commitments)

- Clear enforcement of drug-related activity

BPD has maintained an active and continuous presence in the South End, Roxbury, and other neighborhoods most impacted by outdoor drug use, engaging in 467 drug-related arrests in 2025, an increase of 85% over 2024. The City recognizes that sustained commitment of significant police resources is necessary to address ongoing quality of life and public health concerns.

September 2025 Boston Police Department Updates:

- **New Police Deployments:** On August 22, nearly 100 new police officers graduated from the Boston Police Academy, providing a much-needed boost to the staffing capacity for deployments to priority areas of the South End, Newmarket, and Nubian Square.
- **New Bike Patrol:** Last month, the City added a bike patrol in the D4 (South End) district, supplementing an earlier deployment of the citywide bike unit.
- **Cameras and Public Works Enhancements:** The City has added portable cameras for real-time monitoring of high impact areas based on 311 and 911 call volumes, deployed a new flusher truck to enhance street cleanings, and upgraded 149 light fixtures on Warren and Washington, on top of regular maintenance.

Coordinated Response Strategic Updates:

In the February memo, the City shared that the Coordinated Response Team (CRT), led by Kellie Young, a former member of the Boston Emergency Services Team, would:

- Increase staffing to allow for 7-day coverage;
- Join and lead task forces with community leaders and elected officials, focused on ending congregate substance use, addressing quality of life, and planning regional recovery investments, including a regional recovery campus; and
- Implement a co-response strategy with law enforcement to divert high-need individuals from the judicial process toward recovery services and treatment.

Over the past six months, CRT has stood up an ongoing partnership to divert individuals from the criminal justice system toward programs that provide substance use disorder and mental health related treatment, including Services over Sentences (SOS), a North Suffolk Community Services program supported by the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office and the Commonwealth.

From March 1 to September 1, 2025, CRT has worked directly with an average of 55 individuals per week in the South End, Roxbury, and beyond, transitioning them to acute treatment, residential SUD treatment, recovery services, and transportation to place of

origin. CRT has participated with BPD in petitioning for 32 individuals to be placed in Section 35 commitments as life-saving measures. Over six months, CRT has supported individuals with 297 requests for transportation to a place of origin or to allow for family reunification.

September 2025 Coordinated Response Team Updates:

- **Gavin Foundation Partnership:** In July, the City [announced](#) a new partnership between CRT and the Gavin Foundation that is up and running for reserved treatment beds on demand and immediate transportation. Since August 15, Gavin has assisted 12 individuals with rapid transportation and connection to substance treatment away from the area.
- **Launching new weekly case management Table meeting, jointly convened by CRT, BPD and BPHC:** The City believes that connecting individuals to decentralized treatment, through voluntary navigation, police-assisted diversion, and involuntary sectioning is a critical strategy to help individuals find needed stability and to address public safety and quality of life issues. City leaders are convening a new weekly Hub Table, modeled on successful BPD Hub tables, which bring together substance use, housing, and healthcare providers, as well as state officials, to work through by-name lists and connect individuals with substance use treatment and recovery programs. The Table is organized with the goals of ending outdoor substance use and transitioning individuals away from the area.
- **Limiting Distribution by Third Parties:** The City has instructed all organizations to end tent and meal distribution outdoors and instead direct individuals who need assistance to authorized indoor programs.

The City is continuing to partner with community leaders and local and state officials in ongoing Task Force working groups to address immediate and longer-term needs, including public safety, judicial initiatives, and recovery, including support for a regional recovery campus. CRT is part of a five-person leadership team for a Working Group on Addiction and Recovery that drives initiatives across three focus areas—Recovery, Public Safety, and Judicial Initiatives. The group also hosts bimonthly public meetings. Together, these structures ensure that the Working Group remains action-oriented, inclusive, and focused on building both urgent and sustainable solutions for Boston.

Boston Public Health Commission Strategic Updates:

In the February memo, to further the goal of ending outdoor drug use, BPHC shared that its outreach teams would end outdoor distribution of harm reduction supplies and refer any individuals congregating in the Mass and Cass area and elsewhere to indoor locations/service providers and day spaces. BPHC also shared plans to:

- Increase access to treatment pathways and transportation through the City-funded PAATHS program;
- Continue funding and oversight of 147 low-threshold shelter beds and permanent housing navigation; and
- Expand daily syringe removal and clean-up hours of operation, 311 response, and daily cleaning sweeps of hotspots, parks, and school properties.

Over the past six months, BPHC has taken a leading role in addressing persistent quality of life challenges by strengthening existing programming and initiating new programming. BPHC has worked closely with BPD, CRT, service providers, and state officials to organize the weekly Table meeting. BPHC also regularly participates in Task Force working group meetings.

September 2025 BPHC Updates:

- **Expanded Treatment Access:** BPHC expanded the Providing Access to Addiction Treatment, Hope and Support (PAATHS) program, embedding PAATHS navigators with the street outreach teams to expedite access to treatment. From March 1 to September 1, BPHC has made 785 transports to treatment services, including detox, clinical stabilization services, transitional support services, and outpatient SUD care. During this same time period, BPHC made 1,185 referrals to substance use treatment. BPHC also continues to provide residential treatment to individuals, many referred from the Mass and Cass area, at its 75-bed Mattapan Campus.
- **Transportation and Family Reunification:** BPHC has worked to reconnect individuals with their families and support networks and to move them away from the Mass and Cass area. From March 1 to September 1, BPHC reunited 76 unhoused individuals with families and friends, and helped 70 people return to their community of origin by providing train and bus tickets.
- **Reduction of Needle Distribution:** BPHC has responded to the request to decrease the number of needles discarded by curtailing distribution hours at AHOPE, ending weekend services, and limiting distribution to clients.
- **Increased Needle Pick-Up:** BPHC's Outreach Team works citywide to engage individuals and connect them to services and also supports syringe clean-up efforts. BPHC responded to the needs expressed by the community to increase services. The team now operates from 5am to midnight (previously 6am to 7pm). This team is responsible for syringe collection through proactive sharps sweeps of parks and schools every morning and afternoon.
- **BPHC funding of Newmarket BID:** BPHC is continuing the expanded city partnership with the Newmarket BID to support cleaning, beautification, and syringe pick-up, with ongoing adjustments to address neighborhood needs.

- **Decentralizing Services:** BPHC continues to decentralize vital treatment and recovery services away from the Mass and Cass area. This year, BPHC placed substance use navigators in three community health centers, funded five community organizations to do direct engagement with residents in need, set up six public health vending machines, and funded training of medical providers to build up citywide substance use disorder expertise.
- **Provider Engagement:** Beginning in March of this year, BPHC met with health care providers and the state monthly to improve communications and systems coordination to support the city's goal of ending congregate outdoor drug use. Each of these providers is now participating in the city's Table (as described above).

Our police, public health, public works, and coordinated response teams will continue to be on the ground seven days a week, working to address the impacts on our neighborhoods.

Your ongoing feedback on hotspots, targeted areas that need intensive focus, and other larger issues are critical to our success. Thank you for engaging with the City in this ongoing work.