



# SAFE STATIONS

## MANCHESTER FIRE DEPARTMENT

It was an unlikely place for a heart-to-heart talk.

One day in April 2016, a man walked into a Manchester Fire Department station and asked to talk with his stepbrother, a firefighter. The man poured out his heart in a cry for help, describing his losing battle with opioid addiction.

Christopher Hickey, another firefighter on duty at the time, realized the man needed help. He called a local treatment center and arranged for the stepbrother to be admitted that day. It had been an emotionally powerful experience, and it opened Hickey's eyes.

He contacted then Manchester Mayor Ted Gatsas, who encouraged him to devise a policy for a program allowing anyone struggling with addiction to seek help at any of the Manchester Fire Department's ten fire stations.

And so, on May 4, 2016, Safe Stations was born.

Today, the Safe Station sign sends a powerful message to those facing a personal crisis. It says the station is a designated safe haven for those struggling with addiction. Anyone aged 18 or older can simply show up and ask for help. It's available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Persons needing help with a substance use disorder can speak with the firefighters and EMS on duty to get connected to treatment support and services. No one is turned away because they don't have health insurance.

Hickey now coordinates the program he founded. "We're starting to finally see a drop in the overdoses that we respond to," he says. "We've had days now where we haven't had an overdose, which is a refreshing feeling."

He explains the initial visit begins the process of placement in a treatment facility, unless immediate medical attention is required first.



## SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO TREATMENT

It is crucial for people to have access to a system of care that has adequate capacity to provide all levels of treatment and address all levels of severity for substance use disorders.

In 2016, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 96,000 New Hampshire residents had a substance use disorder. Of those, 88,000 did not receive treatment from a specialty substance use disorder treatment provider.\* Delays in treatment access can mean increased risk for death and other harms associated with substance misuse.

The innovations featured in this section show promise for accelerating our progress in improving treatment access and quality of care patients.

\*Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Tables 22 and 25, available at <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHsaeTotal2016/NSDUHsaeTotals2016.pdf>.



For people arriving between 8:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., a van transfers them directly to a treatment center, often within 15 minutes of being called. For those arriving after 11:00 PM, a clinical representative (CRSWs, case workers, social worker, or LADACs) offers counseling and provides them with a place to stay for the night; they're transferred to a treatment facility the next morning.

For more than a century, the neighborhood fire station has been a symbol of protection and help in time of need. Now in the 21st Century, Manchester's firefighters are proving a new, much-needed service to people in their communities through Safe Station.

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## SUMMARY:

- Safe Stations connects anyone (18+) struggling with a substance use disorder to treatment.
  - The program available 24/7 and does not turn anyone away for lack of insurance.
  - Provides a safe haven for those struggling with addiction.
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