

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARTNERING WITH CLERGY AND CHURCHES

Churches are poised to be important community partners in responding to substance use issues. Stakeholders in sectors like public health, government, criminal justice, etc. should consider these recommendations when exploring partnerships with churches.



MANY CHURCHES ARE EAGER AND READY TO PARTNER

The vast majority churches are already offering support in the form of referrals, hosting support groups, and providing counseling.

Clergy are aware of their limitations and thus desire a trusted network of resources and community partners.

Clergy believe their faith-based work can complement other responses to substance use issues.

Clergy often support the families and friends of people who use substances and desire more resources for this work.



CLERGY JUGGLE MANY DEMANDS ON THEIR TIME & ENERGY

Clergy have unpredictable schedules as they must respond to a variety of church needs.

Education about substance use resources and programs should be practical and easy for clergy and churches to apply.

During trainings, create space for attendees to talk with each other and with you; this is an opportunity for you to understand them and their communities.

Another leader in the church, like a health ministry or lay leader, might be a better point of contact than the head (or solo) pastor. Feel free to ask who that right person might be.

Relational networks are key, so find allies and advocates in local churches. These champions will commit time and energy, and are trusted within their churches and networks.

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CLERGY AND CHURCHES ARE NOT ALL THE SAME

Clergy and churches represent different theological orientations and **will resonate with different approaches to substance use response.**

In a statewide survey, **mainline Protestant** clergy believed their churches would be **more open to harm reduction approaches like syringe exchange and MAT**, while **evangelical** clergy **emphasized opportunities to provide spiritual support.**

Clergy serving Hispanic/Latinx communities highlighted the **need for resources and services in Spanish**, as well as access to **resources for undocumented immigrants.**

Churches span generations, and clergy reported that older generations often emphasize matters of personal choice while young generations focus on models of addiction and disease.

Clergy desire to avoid harmful stigma, and their traditions give them language to instead guide their communities with **messages of healing, hope, unconditional love, grace, and forgiveness.**

Be willing to meet clergy and churches where they are, trusting that there are numerous ways for churches to engage in substance use response.

Results from empirical research conducted by the
Churches Promoting Recovery Project.
For more information, please contact cpr-project@div.duke.edu