



Evidence-Based Approaches to Drug Policy: a Roadmap for Minnesota: ***Social Determinants of Health***

About the Research

In 2023, Minnesota lawmakers funded a research study to develop policy and funding recommendations for drug policy that reduces harm and maximizes community health and safety.

Rise Research submitted two linked reports, the first laying out the state of the evidence, [Drug Policy: State of the Evidence](#) (2024), and the second making recommendations for Minnesota lawmakers, [Evidence-based Approaches to Drug Policy: A Roadmap for Minnesota](#) (2025).

The recommendations were broken into six sections, showing the complexity of the policy problem: Healthcare, Harm Reduction, Social Determinants of Health, Drug Policing, Data Collection and Evaluation, and "Crosscutting"—recommendations that cut across the other five sections.

This brief document highlights the key findings and recommendations from the reports in an easy-to-read format. Links to the original report are provided throughout for additional reading.

Social Determinants of Health Context

[Social determinants of health](#) are non-medical conditions that impact people's health. While Minnesota ranks highly among the states in areas like homeownership, education, and employment, it also has some of the highest racial disparities in these areas in the country—what is known as the Minnesota paradox.

Drug policies can negatively impact these conditions, and the reports therefore describe policies in the areas of children and families, consumer finance, education, employment, housing, immigration, public benefits, and retroactive expungement in need of reform.

Over the last few years, Minnesota has passed laws to reduce the negative impacts of drug policy on the social determinants of health, like removing lifetime bans on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Need Families (TANF) benefits for people with drug felony convictions ([Minn. Stat. 142G.18](#)). In 2023, lawmakers allocated over \$2 billion to address homelessness and improve housing stability, which are critical to supporting the health of people who use drugs and people in recovery.

¹ This responded to statewide data showing that Minnesota's current drug policy isn't working. The problems include rising overdose deaths, racial disparities in overdose deaths, limited access to evidence-based addiction treatment, high numbers of people jailed for drug crimes, and racial disparities in incarceration.

² Researchers reviewed the academic literature and reports from governments, professional bodies, and non-profit organizations; conducted over fifty interviews with Minnesotan experts in the field; and a statutory analysis to arrive at roughly 150 recommendations

However, more work remains: for example, people with drug felony convictions who receive SNAP and TANF benefits must still undergo random drug testing, a stigmatizing requirement that doesn't apply to people with other types of felony convictions.

Below we highlight some of the most important recommendations from the Social Determinants of Health section. For all 56 policy recommendations, please read the complete report.

Housing Recommendations

For each of these recommendations, the primary outcome expected is improving housing and reducing homelessness.

#	Abridged recommendation
61	Continue to oversee the implementation of the Department of Corrections' Homeless Mitigation Plan.
62	Consider the recommendations issued by the Minnesota Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights to expand equitable access to housing.
63	Expand Harm Reduction, Health, and Housing grants program administered by MDH and other programs that facilitate access to treatment for substance use disorders and other social supports for people experiencing homelessness.
64	Ensure the availability of Housing First models, including for people with warrants, with severe mental health issues, and with severe substance use disorders.
67	Enact and enforce legislation that prohibits the criminalization of homelessness.

Employment Recommendations

For each of these recommendations, the primary outcome expected is to improve employment and reduce poverty.

#	Abridged recommendation
77	Establish minimum wage laws to a level sufficient to allow a full-time worker to rise above the poverty line and obtain stable housing.
78	Implement findings from the DHS background study task force.
79-85	Expanding "ban the box" provisions that increase employment access for people with criminal histories.

Children and Families, Immigration Recommendations

#	Abridged recommendation	Primary outcome expected
101	Create state policies that enable pregnant and postpartum people to seek supportive, non-punitive treatment and address the needs of families, including in family care plans by passing a "Model Substance Use During Pregnancy and Family Care Plans Act."	Improve access to substance use disorder treatment, Keep families together
102	Pass legislation removing prenatal substance exposure from the definition of child neglect in Minn. Stat. Sec. 260E.03, subdv. 15; and providing that prenatal substance exposure on its own may not be the basis of investigation by child welfare.	Keep families together
103	Pass a statewide policy around toxicology screening and testing of pregnant people, to create consistency across the state in terms of what substances are screened/tested for and what the threshold is for reporting where the test is positive for an infant	Keep families together
107	Create and fund culturally specific grant programs to prevent drug use among immigrant youth and youth from refugee families	Prevent people from developing substance use disorders

The report establishes that the following policies related to the social determinants of health do not improve the health or safety of Minnesotans: [restricting access to housing](#) based on criminal history; [placing children in the foster care system](#) for parental drug misuse; policy barriers to [employment, education](#), and [public benefits](#) based on criminal history or drug use; laws that prohibit public behaviors associated with [houselessness](#), like sleeping or camping in public, begging, and loitering; and [fines, fees, and debt](#) associated with criminal-legal system involvement.