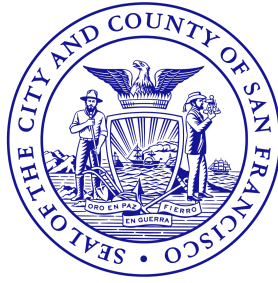


City and County
of San Francisco



Board of Supervisors
Member, District 6

MATT DORSEY

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NEWS RELEASE

‘Recovery First’ ordinance seeks to establish a clear North Star for drug policy in San Francisco

Policy statement would clarify that ‘the primary objective of the City’s drug policy’ be the cessation of all illicit drug use and long-term recovery from addiction

SAN FRANCISCO (Feb. 25, 2025) — Supervisor Matt Dorsey will today introduce legislation to formally establish the cessation of illicit drug use and long-term recovery from addiction as the primary objective of drug policy for the City and County of San Francisco. Dubbed the “Recovery First” ordinance, Dorsey’s proposal seeks to provide a coherent and unifying policy directive to the multitude of city agencies and contractors whose services are related to illicit drug use or to mitigating its myriad and deadly harms. The legislation is co-sponsored by Board President Rafael Mandelman and Supervisors Bilal Mahmood, Stephen Sherrill, Myrna Melgar, Joel Engardio and Danny Sauter.

“Until long-term recovery from addiction is universally embraced as our shared civic goal, our Overdose Prevention Plans will be little better than Overdose Postponement Plans,” said Supervisor **Matt Dorsey**, who has publicly acknowledged his own journey in recovery from drug addiction. “In much the way that ‘Transit First’ has animated our aspirational urbanist vision for five decades, a ‘Recovery First’ drug policy will provide San Francisco with the clear and unifying North Star we need for the new and unique challenges we face in the era of synthetic drugs, like fentanyl and methamphetamine. Given the grim reality of today’s street

drugs, which are more easily trafficked, more profitable, more potently addictive, and deadlier than ever before in human history, it's time to put recovery first.”

Although every drug treatment program currently offered by San Francisco's Department of Public Health aims to help those with Substance Use Disorders, or SUDs, to stop using illicit drugs,¹ interim harm-reduction interventions frequently stir controversy when publicly perceived as the end goal rather than as a means to engage and incentivize treatment and recovery. By clarifying long-term recovery from addiction as the primary objective for drug policy in San Francisco, Dorsey's legislation underscores the supporting and interim role harm reduction services play as “important entry points into drug treatment,” as described in the City's 2022 Overdose Prevention Plan.² San Francisco's operative harm reduction policy for SUDs was adopted nearly 25 years ago by the Health Commission³ as a means “to reduce adverse health effects to individuals, to individuals' families and to the broader community through legal and compassionate interventions.” The model is also wholly premised on assisting those with SUDs “in making choices that lead toward better health.”

Dorsey's proposed legislation, formally entitled the “Recovery First Drug Policy,” would amend the Administrative Code by adding the following one-sentence policy statement: “The cessation of illicit drug use and attainment of long-term Recovery from Substance Use Disorders shall be the primary objective of the City's drug policy.” It will also provide that “recovery” be defined inclusively, as abstinence from illicit substances as well as Medication-Assisted Treatment, or MAT, “administered by a qualified healthcare provider in accordance with applicable federal and state regulations.”

Co-sponsor Quotes

“San Francisco's response to the drug crisis must be rooted in a commitment to recovery and informed by the voices of those who have lived it,” said Board of Supervisors President **Rafael Mandelman**. “The ‘Recovery First’ ordinance sets a clear and unifying goal: helping those

¹ “Treatment on Demand Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Annual Report,” San Francisco Department of Public Health, Behavioral Health Services, March 15, 2024, Page 4, https://media.api.sf.gov/documents/Treatment_on_Demand_Prop_T_Report_FY22-23_FINAL.pdf.

² “Overdose Deaths are Preventable: San Francisco's Overdose Prevention Plan,” San Francisco Department of Public Health, 2022. <https://sf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/SFDPH%20Overdose%20Plan%202022.pdf>.

³ Resolution No. 10-00, Resolution of the Health Commission, City and County of San Francisco, adopted Sept. 5, 2000, <https://www.sfdph.org/dph/hc/HCRes/Resolutions/2000Res/HCRes10-00.shtml>.

struggling with addiction find a path to long-term stability and wellness. By listening to the recovery community and centering their experiences, we can ensure our city's drug policies prioritize treatment, accountability, and, ultimately, hope.”

"Addiction has taken hold of too many of our friends and neighbors, affecting families and children who witness its disheartening impact on our neighborhoods daily. As a city, we must be clear on our stance against drug use and in support recovery,” said Supervisor **Bilal Mahmood**, who represents the Tenderloin neighborhood. “‘Recovery First’ is common-sense legislation that will point our city in the right direction and I commend Supervisor Dorsey for his leadership.”

“San Francisco must be a city that celebrates success—and recovery is just that. As the City confronts its worst public health crisis since HIV/AIDS, engaging law enforcement alone isn't enough,” said Supervisor **Stephen Sherrill**. “If we're going to overcome this, recovery has to be front and center.”

"This Ordinance is a straight-forward update to the Administrative Code to emphasize our City's goal of recovery. While recovery is not always linear, it should always be our goal to get people healthy," said Supervisor **Myrna Melgar**.

Community Perspectives

“For too long, harm reduction has shaped San Francisco’s drug policy and addiction response, yet our city’s drug and overdose crisis continues to spiral out of control,” said **Steve Adami**, Executive Director of The Way Out, a recovery-focused homeless initiative of The Salvation Army. “It’s time for a bold shift, one that puts recovery at the heart of our response. By prioritizing abstinence-based recovery, expanding access to treatment, and creating real pathways to sobriety and independence, we can offer people more than survival — we can help them rebuild their lives. We must invest in solutions that help people overcome addiction, not perpetuate it. Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ ordinance marks a pivotal moment for San Francisco by making recovery the foundation of our city’s drug policy.”

“We must end drug tourism and bring back an atmosphere of recovery to San Francisco,” said **Richard Beal**, Director of Recovery Services for the Tenderloin Housing Clinic. “‘Recovery First’ is needed for those struggling with drug addiction. Thank you, Sup. Matt Dorsey, for championing this much needed ordinance!”

“Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ ordinance prioritizes treatment and recovery, a crucial policy shift,” said **Jacqui Berlinn**, Executive Director of Mothers Against Drug Addiction & Deaths. “San Francisco must help people overcome addiction, not just manage its harms. This policy offers a compassionate framework, centering recovery as the ultimate goal. It clearly commits to that aim.”

“The ‘Recovery First’ Ordinance will provide much-needed policy direction to disparate approaches by our city government, which too often seem at cross-purposes,” said **Lanier Coles**, President of Drug-Free Sidewalks, a public advocacy organization to end public drug use in San Francisco. “We welcome Supervisor Dorsey’s legislation to prioritize long-term recovery, which is consistent with Drug-Free Sidewalk’s mission.”

“Supervisor Dorsey’s ‘Recovery First’ policy strengthens San Francisco’s commitment to ending drug enablistm,” said **Destiny Pletsch**, Deputy Director of The Salvation Army’s recovery-focused homeless initiative, The Way Out. “To date, city policies and efforts have normalized addiction. Abstinence from recovery should not be controversial, and our systems should be designed to give people back their lives. By uniting the city and its contracted partners under a shared mission, we can take a bold, solutions-focused approach to the drug and overdose crisis — investing in strategies that empower individuals to break free from addiction and reclaim their health, stability, and independence.”

“I am proud to share my 15 year Recovery Journey with folks like Matt Dorsey,” said **Del Seymour**, a longtime community leader and founder of Tenderloin Blackness. “Having a drug-free life should be the goal of all of the community. It also should be a priority in the city’s care of its residents. To me, it’s not how you get there — but that you get there. I applaud the efforts of the Mayor, Department of Public Health, Board of Supervisors and the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing to move this Ordinance forward.”

“As a native San Franciscan and lifetime member of the City Hall family, I am very grateful for the resources and community here that made my own long term recovery journey possible,” said **Heidi Sieck**, civic entrepreneur and national reproductive rights leader. “It is heartbreaking to bear witness to the mounting challenges people face in finding solid paths to sobriety today. Fentanyl, post-pandemic economic decline and now mounting budget cuts all play a part. That is why our focus must be consistent and deliberate — along with a huge dose

of compassion — as we marshal what resources we do have to ensure that paths remain available for people to find a way out.”

“For too long, San Francisco has utilized an unclear set of piecemeal drug policies to mitigate the drug crisis,” said **Tom Wolf**, recovery advocate and Director of West Coast Initiatives at the Foundation for Drug Policy Solutions. “Having a unifying message of ‘Recovery First’ not only sets the bar higher, but clearly defines that our public health approach is to promote recovery from addictions. ‘Recovery First’ not only saves lives, it transforms them for the better.”

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For immediate release:

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Contact: BRYAN DAHL

Bryan.Dahl@sfgov.org

+1 (415) 554-7969 w

+1 (650) 465-4358 c

1 [Administrative Code - Recovery First Drug Policy]

2

3 **Ordinance amending the Administrative Code to establish the cessation of illicit drug**
4 **use and attainment of long-term recovery from substance use disorders as the primary**
5 **objective of the City’s drug policy.**

6

7 NOTE: **Unchanged Code text and uncodified text** are in plain Arial font.
8 **Additions to Codes** are in *single-underline italics Times New Roman font*.
9 **Deletions to Codes** are in ~~*strikethrough italics Times New Roman font*~~.
10 **Board amendment additions** are in double-underlined Arial font.
11 **Board amendment deletions** are in ~~strikethrough Arial font~~.
12 **Asterisks (* * * *)** indicate the omission of unchanged Code
13 subsections or parts of tables.

11

12 Be it ordained by the People of the City and County of San Francisco:

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14 Section 1. Chapter 15 of the Administrative Code is hereby amended by adding
15 Section 15.19, to read as follows:

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17 **SEC. 15.19. RECOVERY FIRST DRUG POLICY.**

18 (a) **Title.** This Section 15.19 shall be known as the “Recovery First Drug Policy.”

19 (b) **Definitions.** For purposes of this Section 15.19, the following terms have the following
20 meanings:

21 (1) “Recovery” means abstinence from illicit drugs, and shall include participation
22 in a Medication-Assisted-Treatment program administered by a qualified healthcare provider in
23 accordance with applicable laws and medical guidance.

24 (2) “Substance Use Disorder” has the meaning set forth in the 5th edition of the
25 American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, as may be

