

## Consequence shouldn't be death

To the Editor,

As a millennial, I remember the Drug Abuse Resistance Education campaign of the 1990s (I think I even had one of the T-shirts), so I can understand the idea that to keep drugs from scrambling your brain like an egg, all you have to do is say 'no.' But, it's not that simple, and in truth it never was. Many people for a variety of personal, entirely legitimate, and often deeply tragic reasons could not simply 'just say no' to drugs. Addiction is neither a failure of character nor a simple matter of choice, but even if it was, the consequence shouldn't be death. People who use drugs are exactly that - people; they are our neighbours, our friends, and our family members, and they are both deserving of equitable access to health care and worthy of our compassion. Harm reduction strategies like naloxone kits, overdose prevention education, needle exchange programs, and - especially - safe consumption sites, save lives. The decades since the DARE campaigns of yesteryear have taught us that putting school children in handcuffs to scare them off using drugs didn't work. Meeting people where they are and treating them with kindness promises to be a much more humane and (ultimately) effective strategy.

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