1. Executive Summary and Recommendations

This report represents a collaborative effort on behalf of the Maine Coalition for Sensible Drug Policy. It endeavors to explore the ongoing opioid crisis in all of its depth and breadth, painting a comprehensive picture of this public health crisis, its sociocultural moorings, and the impact of public policy on the crisis, by:

- highlighting the extent to which drug use exists along a continuum from benign through chaotic use patterns;
- exploring the strong connection between experiences of trauma and severe mental illness and the development of problematic relationships with drugs;
- adopting a broad definition of recovery, that encompasses any positive step towards improving one's health and wellbeing;
- documenting escalating rates of accidental drug poisonings, hepatitis C and other related conditions;
- exploring the failings and inappropriateness of the criminal justice system in addressing drug use;
- recognizing and calling out the racially motivated foundations and racialized consequences of punitive approaches to addressing drug use;
- elaborating on barriers to treatment and care and the contributions of the previous administration in exacerbating these issues; and
- highlighting the discrimination and stigma faced by people with a history of drug use in housing, employment, health care and other sectors.

The Coalition created this report to provide information and recommendations that, if accepted, will have a far-reaching and positive impact on Maine's addiction crisis. This report is a summary of the Coalition's in-depth report, which includes sources for background information and recommendations. The original report is available at the Health Equity Alliance.

The Coalition asserts specific recommendations to address the opioid crisis and advance sensible drug policy with the goals of reducing the prevalence of problematic drug use, reducing drug-related harms and facilitating recovery for people with problematic relationships with drugs. Recommendations fall into six domains:

- Primary prevention – reducing the prevalence of problematic drug use;
- Harm reduction – reducing drug-related harms associated with problematic drug use;
- Treatment and Care – increasing access to treatment for people with problematic drug use;
- Recovery Supports – advancing and sustaining health and wellbeing for people with a history of drug use;
- Criminal Justice – advancing criminal justice reform to align with public health evidence and a compassionate approach to drug use and reduce the impact of structural racism in public policy;
- Anti-Discrimination – reducing stigma and discrimination experienced by people who use drugs.
### Recommendations:

1. Improve and expand social safety net programs to reduce poverty, deprivation and social marginalization that drive rates of adverse childhood experiences.

2. Increase resiliency among youth and mitigate the effects of childhood trauma by fostering and funding evidence-based, age appropriate programs.

3. Support and fund harm reduction programming to establish well-resourced, fully-staffed syringe exchange and naloxone distribution centers in every county and foster outreach programs that conduct community and street-level outreach to people who use drugs, with a focus on those populations disproportionately impacted by substance use.

4. Fund and sanction the establishment of safer drug consumption facilities in major metropolitan areas throughout Maine.

5. Expand access to case management services for people who consume drugs, people engaged in treatment and people in short-term recovery including support with employment, housing and other needs.

6. Reduce reluctance to seek care by supporting and funding educational programs for healthcare providers about stigma surrounding people who consume drugs, harm reduction in health care, substance use treatment and compassionate care for people who consume drugs.

7. Reduce barriers to accessing treatment to ensure that all people who need substance use treatment can access it, including low-barrier and flexible treatment programs and additional supports for parents of young children.

8. Establish methadone and buprenorphine maintenance therapy, including comprehensive trauma-informed counseling services, in every county in Maine.

9. Cultivate low-barrier access to medical detox services by supporting and funding the establishment of medical detox services in every county in Maine.

10. Foster, support and fund programming offered through local recovery community centers established and maintained by people in long-term recovery including employment supports and job readiness programs, housing supports, recovery coaching services and other peer recovery support services.

11. Increase access to housing for people in all stages of recovery, including people who are actively using drugs, people in short-term recovery and people who are pregnant or parenting.

12. Decriminalize possession of all drugs. Possession of illicit drugs and/or materials used to administer drugs becomes an administrative offense on all counts, regardless of the quantity of the substance within the possession of the accused. Eliminate the permissible inference of trafficking or furnishing based solely on the weight or amount of a substance possessed by the accused and add intent as an element of the crimes of trafficking and furnishing.
13. Mandate the provision of a full range of treatment, including medication assisted treatment, and assertive post-release supports to cultivate seamless access to treatment upon release for people with substance use disorders in correctional facilities, for all correctional settings throughout Maine.

14. Divert people out of the criminal justice system for crimes driven by substance use by supporting and funding the development of pre-booking diversion programs, modeled on and adapting the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program in every county throughout Maine.

15. Require the collection of data related to race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status for all stops, arrests, charges, convictions, sentences and other events at all levels of the criminal justice system. Establish a community panel to review data annually with the authority to require further review and action to address disparities. Require racial impact statements for all new policies considered by the Maine State Legislature.

16. Support employment for people with a history of drug use and reduce employment discrimination by funding programs to engage employers around the importance of purpose for people in recovery and offering protections and incentives to hire people with substance use disorders as well as passing broad ‘Fair Chance’ policies that restrict the consideration of criminal history for all employment, housing, licensing and other relevant application processes. These should be supplemented by policies that address racial bias in hiring practices.

17. Establish and/or amend non-discrimination policies to encompass people with substance use disorders, affording them protections against discrimination in housing.

18. Support and fund a coordinated public education campaign and other efforts to reduce stigma around substance use and shift the cultural perception of people who consume drugs.

5.3 Supporting Organizations:

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Maine
- Amistad
- Church of Safe Injection
- Coastal Recovery Community Center
- Frannie Peabody Center
- Health Equity Alliance
- James’ Place
- Journey House Recovery
- Maine Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
- Maine Equal Justice Partners
- Maine Family Planning
- Maine HIV Advisory Committee
- Maine People’s Alliance
- Maine Prisoners Advocacy Coalition
- Maine Prisoners Reentry Network
- Midcoast Recovery Coalition
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Maine Prison Branch
- National Association of Pregnant Women
- Penobscot Community Health Center
- Portland Overdose Prevention Site
- Wabanaki Health and Wellness
- Young People in Recovery, Maine