

MATTERS[®]

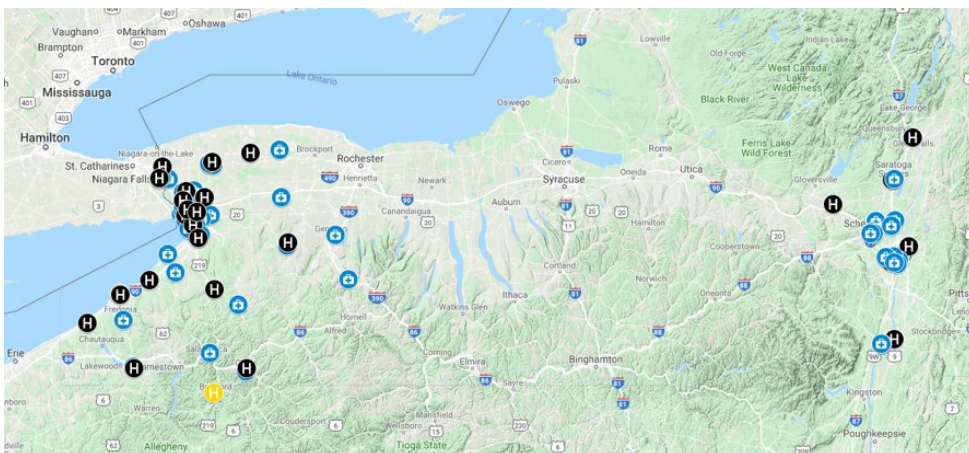
Medication for Addiction Treatment & Electronic Referrals

Background

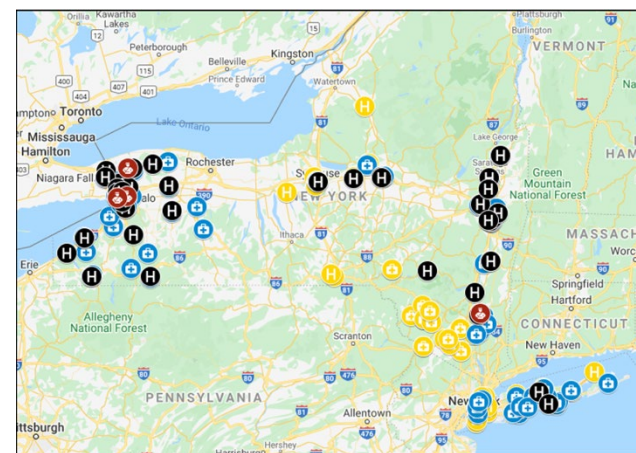
In 2016, the University at Buffalo Department of Emergency Medicine (UBEM) in combination with UB|MD Emergency Medicine set out to decrease opioid prescribing in their emergency departments in response to the rising concerns regarding opioid use disorder (OUD). Guidelines were established for patients and prescribers for appropriate opioid prescribing. To ensure consistency across the region, these documents were endorsed by every major health system and urgent care organization in Western New York. From 2015 to 2018, the emergency departments of the major academic health centers in Buffalo saw a >50% decline in opioid prescribing. However, there was more to be done.

MATTERS Founder and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Joshua Lynch, saw the inadequacies in how our system treated patients with OUD. Upon leaving the emergency department, patients were given a list of outpatient facilities to call themselves, oftentimes listing old numbers and leading patients to another dead end when seeking care. When providers took the time to call an outpatient clinic to schedule an appointment, it took time away from an already over-packed emergency department. That is when Dr. Lynch, in partnership with UB | MD Emergency Medicine, developed the [MATTERS \(Medication for Addiction Treatment and Electronic Referrals\) concept](#).

The MATTERS concept began as Buffalo MATTERS with an aggressive effort to train emergency physicians and advanced practice providers (APPs) in responsible opioid prescribing, medication-assisted treatment (buprenorphine primarily), and rapid referrals. The team onboarded one major hospital in Western New York and three outpatient clinics in a pilot to show proof of concept. Through demonstrated success, applicability to various other health settings, and outreach efforts, the network grew. This concept quickly grew and has since expanded across New York State (NYS) with the support of the NYS Department of Health and the NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports.



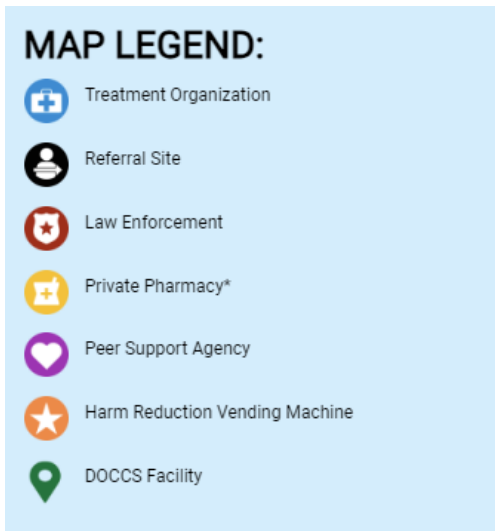
Map of MATTERS Network Partners
November 2019



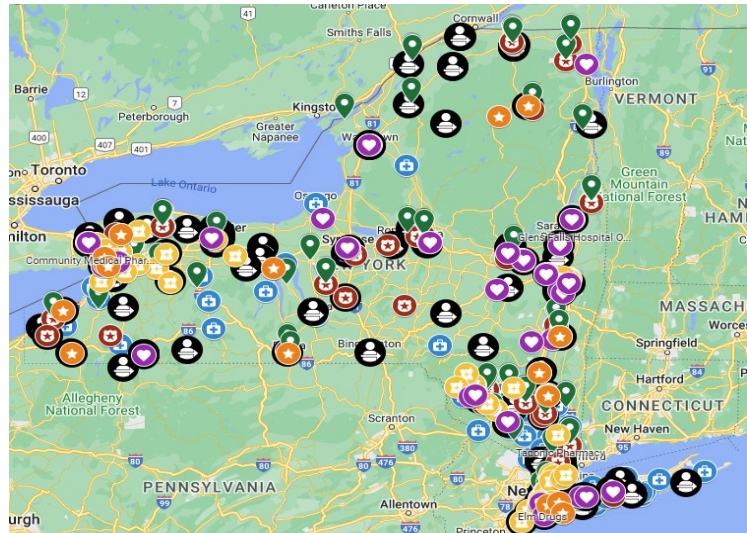
Map of MATTERS Network partners -
November 2021

Program Overview

Today, MATTERS facilitates rapid referrals across NYS from various partnering organizations, including emergency departments, inpatient units, first responder agencies, law enforcement, opioid courts, telemedicine agencies, and community-based organizations. These partners submit referrals, linking individuals with OUD to an outpatient treatment program of their choice.



Current Map Legend



Current Map of MATTERS Partners

MATTERS partners with 290+ referring sites, 250+ receiving treatment organizations, and 1,000+ private and large chain pharmacies across NYS. Individuals referred through MATTERS can choose from over 2,300 weekly appointment slots available through the platform and can be seen as soon as the next day for treatment. MATTERS referrals are completed online in just 3-5 minutes. They also offer additional harm reduction and health-promoting resources to help individuals with OUD get connected and stay connected to treatment.

Transportation and financial/insurance issues are some of the most common barriers to treatment for individuals with substance use disorder (SUD). In response, MATTERS offers [transportation vouchers](#) to cover the cost of a round-trip ride for an individual's first clinic appointment. MATTERS also offers [medication vouchers](#), which cover the cost of up to 14 days of any oral buprenorphine prescription for the uninsured. Individuals who are referred through MATTERS also can opt-in to be referred to a peer in recovery for support. Peers are individuals who have had success in their recovery and work to support people who are in their early, most vulnerable stages of recovery. These resources are built into the MATTERS referral platform and take no extra steps or phone calls.

To further reduce common barriers to treatment, [MATTERS has expanded to offer telemedicine services across NYS](#). Many individuals with SUD live in rural areas and/or lack consistent access to transportation (Rural Health Information Hub, 2020); telemedicine services offer flexibility for individuals seeking treatment.

Individuals referred through MATTERS can choose to follow up with a virtual treatment organization and receive the care they need from the comfort of their own homes.



Program Overview - Continued

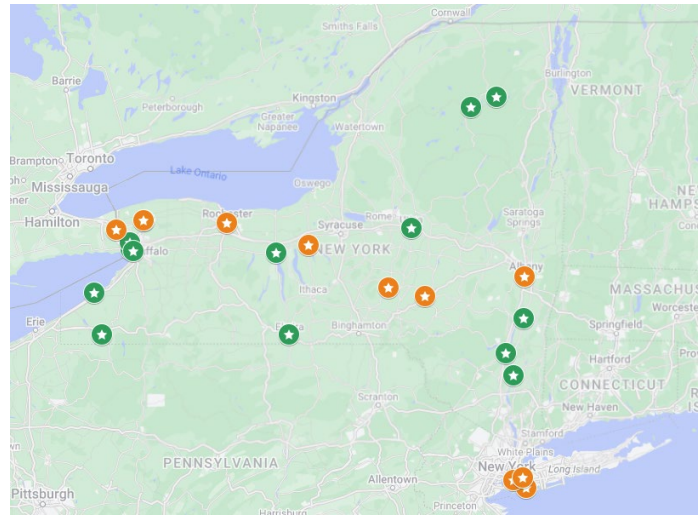
Additionally, individuals who are not yet linked to treatment can connect to telemedicine services in as little as one hour on the MATTERS Network website or mobile app. Individuals will receive a rapid evaluation for OUD, medication prescription (as applicable), and a MATTERS referral to treatment. Individuals referred through telemedicine are offered the same support as any other patient, including transportation and medication vouchers. MATTERS telemedicine services remove barriers and improve overall access to treatment for SUD.

Harm reduction is another strategy to improve access to treatment for individuals with SUD (SAMHSA, 2023). MATTERS' suggested protocol recommends the utilization of harm reduction supplies to support people who use drugs (PWUD). Specifically, the MATTERS protocol recommends that individuals be supplied with fentanyl test strips, xylazine test strips, and naloxone at the time of referral. [MATTERS distributes free fentanyl and xylazine test strips to individuals and organizations across NYS](#); the MATTERS team has distributed over 15 million test strips since this service launched in August 2022. These supplies are delivered directly to any address in New York, serving as vital tools for harm reduction, overdose prevention, and linkage to health services.



MATTERS-branded Test Strips

In addition to distributing harm reduction supplies via direct mail, MATTERS launched its [harm reduction vending machines](#) program in NYS to improve access to and awareness of these life-saving supplies. MATTERS has deployed 15 vending machines across the state and plans to expand this program over time. Vending machines are available 24/7, 365 days a year, and offer free fentanyl test strips, xylazine test strips, and naloxone.



Current Vending Machine Map

New Directions

The MATTERS program is constantly evolving to better meet the needs of individuals with SUD. Many individuals with OUD may experience mental health concerns or engage in polysubstance use (Compton, Valentino & DuPont, 2021). To better serve these populations, MATTERS' referral platform is working to expand to offer referrals for other SUD, including alcohol use disorder, stimulant use disorder, and mental health conditions. This integration of other forms of SUD into the MATTERS referral platform will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of referrals and will improve patient outcomes. In addition to expanding its services for SUD, MATTERS continues to grow geographically.

Many individuals living in NYS may commute to neighboring states for work or pleasure, and vice versa. In 2024, the MATTERS platform began its expansion into New Jersey and Pennsylvania to improve access to treatment for SUD. This expansion will offer flexibility to individuals who work and live across state lines in choosing which location they prefer to follow up for treatment. This effort further supports MATTERS' mission of providing every person living with substance use and mental health disorders multiple pathways to treatment and resources within their own communities.

References

- Rural Health Information Hub (2020). *Need for substance use disorder programs in rural communities*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/toolkits/substance-abuse/1/need>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2023). *Harm reduction*. Retrieved from: <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/harm-reduction>
- Compton, W. M., Valentino, R. J., & DuPont, R. L. (2021). Polysubstance use in the U.S. opioid crisis. *Molecular psychiatry*, 26(1), 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41380-020-00949-3>