How Georgia Leveraged Data and Partnerships to Improve Overdose Preparedness and Response

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Background

Disruptions in access to prescription-controlled substances, such as clinic closures, provider loss, state and/or federal enforcement actions can create immediate risks for patients and communities. Individuals may experience withdrawal, unmanaged pain, or destabilized physical or behavioral health conditions, and may turn to alternative sources, increasing overdose risk. These events can unfold rapidly and with limited advance notice, requiring states to move beyond routine operations and deploy a rapid, coordinated response to assess potential impacts, support affected individuals, and mitigate disruption-related overdose risks.

Effective response depends on timely situational awareness and coordination between public health, health care, public safety, and community-based partners. Clear protocols help states quickly identify affected populations, assess risk, and mobilize appropriate support.

Georgia offers one example of how this work can be operationalized. This report highlights how the state responds to prescription disruption through an approach supported by established protocols, informed by data, and carried out through coordinated state and local partnerships.

State Leadership and Response Structure

Georgia's disruption preparedness and response activities are led through a structure that brings together roles supported by Overdose Data to Action in States (OD2A) and the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS), two federally supported initiatives that strengthen overdose surveillance, prevention, and cross-sector coordination. The Georgia Department of Public Health serves as both the OD2A state recipient and the ORS site lead agency, aligning surveillance, prevention, preparedness, and response activities across both programs.

An OD2A-funded Opioid Prevention and Response Coordinator and ORS-funded Public Health Analyst serve as Georgia's state leads for disruption preparedness and response activities. Together, they serve as the state's designated Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Opioid Rapid Response Program (ORRP) trusted contacts, acting as primary points of contact for disruption notifications and coordinating preparedness and response activities across state and local partners.

This partnership brings together complementary public health functions. Through OD2A, Georgia leverages overdose prevention infrastructure, surveillance capacity, and statewide public health coordination. Through ORS, the Public Health Analyst works alongside a Drug Intelligence Officer, strengthening collaboration between public health and public safety and enhancing situational awareness during disruption events, particularly those involving law enforcement actions or emerging drug threats.

Disruption response is further embedded within Georgia's broader overdose prevention infrastructure through OD2A Strategy 7 (Public Health/Public Safety Partnerships and Interventions), which supports cross-sector partnerships, implementation of disruption response protocols, improved data sharing, and coordinated planning for acute events such as overdose spikes. By integrating disruption response into these ongoing activities, Georgia strengthens coordination and maintains readiness to rapidly respond when disruption events occur.

ASTHO and CDC's Opioid Rapid Response Program further support Georgia's state leads through technical assistance, preparedness resources, and peer learning opportunities that strengthen the state's capacity to prepare for and respond to disruption events.

Establishing Preparedness Through Protocols

Georgia's response to disruptions is grounded in preparedness planning supported through collaboration with ASTHO and ORRP. Participation in an ASTHO-supported Opioid Preparedness Exercise provided an opportunity to identify key partners, clarify roles and responsibilities, and evaluate how the state would coordinate during a disruption event. Lessons learned from the exercise directly informed development of Georgia's disruption response protocol. Led by Georgia's ORRP trusted contacts in collaboration with key response partners, the protocol serves as the foundation for the state's disruption preparedness and response efforts.

The protocol establishes a framework for coordinating response by outlining partner roles, communication pathways, response activities, and resources that support response implementation. It also serves as a shared resource for orienting partners, reinforcing responsibilities, and promoting a unified approach to disruption response.

Rather than serving as a static document, the protocol supports ongoing preparedness through regular review and partner engagement. Georgia conducts an annual review of the protocol, updating partner contact information, refining response processes, and making revisions as needed. During the annual review, established partners are reminded of their roles and responsibilities, new partners are oriented to the protocol and their specific responsibilities, and feedback from disruption events is incorporated to strengthen future response efforts.

Preparedness in Practice: Putting the Protocol into Action

Following a provider's surrender of their license during an enforcement action, Georgia rapidly activated its disruption response protocol to support patients receiving care through two pain management clinics. Using Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) data, the state identified more than 450 patients across six counties who could potentially be affected by the disruption.

Because partner roles, communication pathways, and response tools had already been established, the response team was able to quickly notify key partners, implement communication protocols, and distribute updated patient resource lists. District public health analysts coordinated with local community partners to support outreach, share patient resource letters, and prepare for potential increases in individuals seeking services. At the same time, Georgia's Drug Surveillance Unit (DSU) monitored overdose-related trends in the affected area for any changes following the disruption.

Having established protocols, defined partner roles, and existing communication pathways streamlined coordination and enabled Georgia partners to respond quickly and confidently with a clear understanding of their responsibilities throughout the response.

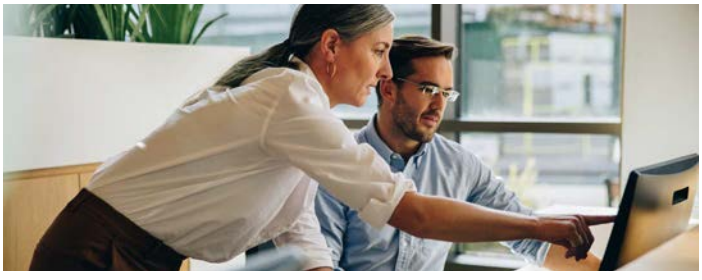
Using Surveillance Data to Inform Situational Awareness

When a disruption is identified, Georgia's ORRP Trusted Contacts work with the state PDMP to assess the potential impacts of the disruption. The response team reviews the types and amounts of controlled substances prescribed, estimates the number of potentially affected patients, and identifies the geographic areas where outreach may be needed. This information helps determine the scope of the response and prioritize outreach efforts.

At the same time, Georgia's Drug Surveillance Unit (DSU) — which routinely monitors overdose-related data statewide — examines hospital admissions, emergency department visits, EMS encounters, and syndromic surveillance data in the affected area to identify any increases or unusual patterns in overdose activity following the disruption. While overdoses cannot be directly attributed to prescription disruptions, PDMP and DSU data together provide important context for understanding potential impacts and informing response communications and coordination.

If surveillance data indicate increases or anomalies in overdose activity that may be associated with the disruption, Georgia expands community response efforts. These activities may include increasing distribution of opioid overdose reversal medications and providing targeted communications to health care providers, hospitals, first responders, recovery organizations, and local public health partners.

Together, these efforts help the state interpret trends within the local context and translate surveillance data into actionable situational awareness.



Coordinating Response Through State and Local Partnerships

Once the potential impact of a disruption has been assessed, Georgia activates a coordinated response through its network of state and local partners. Georgia's ORRP trusted contacts serve as the primary points of coordination, working with partners to share situational updates, determine response priorities, implement the state's disruption response protocol, and coordinate communication throughout the response.

At the state level, the trusted contacts coordinate with partners across the Georgia Department of Public Health and other state agencies to guide response activities and support statewide communication. Key partners include the PDMP, Emergency Preparedness Program, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Georgia Composite Medical Board, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Board of Pharmacy, and other agencies involved in health care, public safety, licensing, and regulatory oversight. Coordination and communication are guided by the state's disruption response protocol, with the trusted contacts monitoring implementation throughout the response.

At the local level, Georgia's network of 18 district-based Public Health Analysts plays a central role in implementing response activities. Embedded within local health agencies, these analysts provide real-time insight into local conditions and conduct outreach to affected health care providers, patients, and community partners. Their activities may include contacting impacted facilities, distributing patient resources, coordinating with hospitals, public safety agencies, first responders, and community organizations, and helping connect affected individuals to treatment, opioid overdose reversal medications, recovery supports, and other community services.

Together, these state and local partnerships enable Georgia to rapidly coordinate response activities across multiple levels of the public health system while tailoring outreach and resources to the specific circumstances of each disruption event.

Sustaining Readiness Through Continuous Improvement

Following disruption response activities, Georgia continues monitoring overdose-related data through the DSU for a defined period to identify any ongoing or emerging impacts. Approximately one week after the event, state leads meet with district Public Health Analysts to debrief the response, discuss lessons learned, and gather feedback from response partners.

Insights from post-event monitoring, debrief discussions, and hot washes are used to refine the disruption response protocol and strengthen future preparedness efforts. By incorporating lessons learned into planning, Georgia continuously improves its protocols, partnerships, and response processes to enhance readiness for future disruption events.

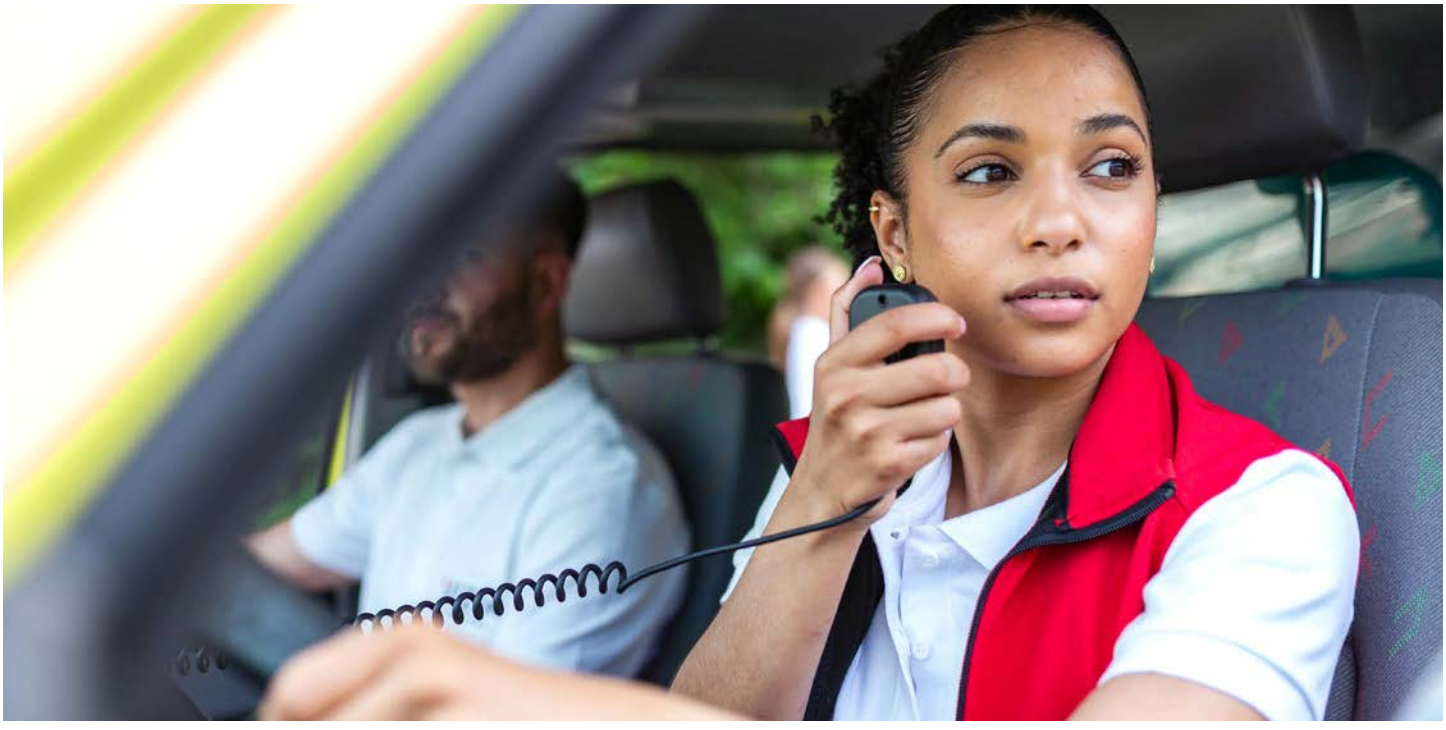
Key Takeaways for Jurisdictions

Georgia's experience demonstrates that effective prescription disruption response begins long before a disruption occurs. By investing in preparedness, maintaining strong partnerships, and routinely evaluating response efforts, jurisdictions can strengthen their ability to rapidly coordinate and respond when disruptions arise. The following strategies and resources can help jurisdictions build and sustain this capacity.

Table 1: Effective Prescription Disruption Response

Strategy	Actions for Jurisdictions	Resources
Build disruption response into existing overdose prevention infrastructure.	Identify where disruption preparedness fits within existing overdose prevention, emergency preparedness, or public health/public safety initiatives. Integrate disruption preparedness into existing overdose prevention initiatives (e.g., OD2A, ORS, emergency preparedness, or similar efforts) to support ongoing planning, coordination, and readiness.	Program Overview by ORS About the Opioid Rapid Response Program by CDC Overdose Data to Action by CDC
Develop and routinely update response protocols.	Develop a disruption response protocol that clearly defines partner roles, communication pathways, and response activities. Review the protocol annually, confirm partner contact information, and orient new partners to their roles.	Responding to Disruptions in Access to Controlled Substance Medications: A Guide for State Health Departments and Their Partners by ASTHO Response Protocol Template by ASTHO
Test plans and engage partners before disruptions occur.	Conduct preparedness exercises and routinely engage partners to clarify responsibilities, strengthen relationships, and build confidence before a disruption occurs.	Opioid Preparedness Exercise Summary by ASTHO Opioid Preparedness Exercise in a Box Toolkit by ASTHO

Table 1: Effective Prescription Disruption Response (Continued)

Strategy	Actions for Jurisdictions	Resources
Use multiple data sources to guide response.	Combine PDMP, overdose surveillance, EMS, hospital, and other available data to understand potential impacts and prioritize response activities. Understand your state's PDMP capabilities and legal authorities, and integrate PDMP and overdose surveillance data to assess impacts and guide response activities.	Public Health and Safety Team Toolkit by PHAST Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program by ODMAP Nonfatal Drug Overdose Surveillance and Epidemiology (DOSE) System by CDC About the State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System (SUDORS) by CDC
Continuously improve preparedness.	Following disruption events or exercises, conduct debriefs or hot washes, incorporate lessons learned, and update protocols, partner lists, and response processes.	OD2A Evaluation Profiles by CDC

Georgia's experience demonstrates that investments in preparedness, surveillance, and cross-sector partnerships can significantly strengthen rapid response to controlled substance disruptions. By integrating these efforts into existing public health infrastructure and continuously refining response processes, jurisdictions can build more coordinated, adaptable, and sustainable systems to support patients and communities during future disruption events.