

February 11, 2026

CRAIN'S NY

NY Overdose Prevention Centers Sheltered Hundreds During New York's Coldest Weekend

BY [ETHAN GERINGER-SAMETH](#)



Ethan Geringer-Sameth

OnPoint NYC Executive Director Sam Rivera, Medical Services Director Susan Spratt and Director of Community Initiatives and Low-Threshold Services Jason Beltre stand in the organization's East Harlem clinic.

As the sun went down on Sunday, dozens of New Yorkers gathered in the drop-in room of East Harlem's overdose prevention center to escape one of the coldest nights of a freeze that has killed more than a dozen people.

The center on E. 126th St. is one of two locations in the city where individuals can use drugs under the supervision of medical professionals who can intervene in an overdose. The program, run by the nonprofit OnPoint NYC, is one of the only of its kind operating legally in the country, which puts it at the forefront of the so-called harm reduction movement.

Although not a shelter, Mayor Zohran Mamdani extended the group's city contract to keep its doors open overnight during the frigid weekend after an estimated three people died of suspected drug overdoses out in the cold. The move is part of Mamdani's "all-hands-on-deck" approach to the historic weather, which has dovetailed with an emerging homeless outreach agenda.

Throughout the weekend, individuals slept in reclining chairs or ate at a table in OnPoint's drop-in center. A TV played movies amid a constant churn of people pausing for respite or spending the night. OnPoint said its two locations collectively had almost 850 visitors throughout the

weekend, including about 150 overnight stays each night. Most were previous program participants who would otherwise have had to leave at closing time. By early Sunday morning, outdoor temperatures had dropped to 3 degrees without factoring in wind chill.

“We talk to them and it’s like, ‘Where would you be if you weren’t here?’ A train station. Under a bridge somewhere,” said Jason Beltre, director of community initiatives and low-threshold services, at the center on Sunday.

Mamdani has tapped a range of city resources to reach homeless New Yorkers, opening more than 300 low-barrier shelter beds, deploying hundreds of city outreach workers, and piloting new programs like the partnership with OnPoint. Last weekend marked the first time OnPoint’s program operated around the clock.

“For many homeless New Yorkers, their prior experiences with the shelter system, their prior experiences with the services they’ve been provided, are also what color their decision making of whether or not they should be inside or outside,” Mamdani said during an appearance on New York Public Radio’s *The Brian Lehrer Show* on Feb. 5.

“We don’t want to go to them and say, ‘There’s only one option you have. Take it or leave it,’ ” he said. “Our goal is to go to these homeless New Yorkers and say, ‘Here are the many different ways that you can come indoors, be warm, be safe,’ and ensure that we are actually meeting that moment and meeting their needs.”

OnPoint’s staff saw the words as a nod to the harm reduction model and an acknowledgement of the complex needs of many of the poorest New Yorkers — an approach that has, at least in tone, deviated from prior administrations.

“That’s amazing,” said OnPoint’s executive director Sam Rivera. “Of the 17 (people who died), three or four died of overdoses. That’s enough for him to say, ‘Let’s call OnPoint and negotiate a plan to keep them open.’ ”

Staff at the East Harlem site were watching videos of Bad Bunny in preparation for his Super Bowl Halftime Show when the mayor announced the partnership on Friday.

“We lost it. The whole place was shaking,” Rivera said. “And it was a beautiful moment. Without saying OnPoint he said OnPoint.”

The organization struggled for years to get city support before it opened two overdose prevention centers in East Harlem and Washington Heights in 2021 under Mayor Bill de Blasio.

Restrictions on how the organization can spend public dollars mean philanthropy entirely funds its overdose prevention operation. But most of OnPoint’s \$17 million annual budget comes from government sources to pay for the drop-in center, case management, outreach and medical services. Since opening, the overdose prevention centers have served roughly 7,000 participants and reversed 2,000 overdoses.

Last July, President Donald Trump issued an executive order targeting overdose prevention centers, threatening OnPoint’s fledgling stability. Then in October, the organization lost a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration worth roughly half a million dollars. The same month, then-mayoral nominee Mamdani said on the debate stage that he supported keeping OnPoint’s two overdose prevention sites in operation but fell short of endorsing additional prevention centers.

The emergency city contract last weekend meant OnPoint’s drop-in center could remain open for an extra 8-hour shift, something Rivera said he has been discussing with the Health Department since before Mamdani took office. The cost of the weekend is still being tallied,

according to City Hall, but Rivera sees the emergency as an opportunity.

“I expect ... to have some interesting and fun conversations about what we do now and how we do it,” he said. “And now that we can actually give real numbers, that’s great.”

Sunday evening, OnPoint threw a Super Bowl party for the overnight guests and staff.

“It’s a big family. They get a chance to eat, relax,” said Neenee Davis, a harm reduction supervisor. “They trust us. They believe that we’re going to do everything in our power to make sure they are safe and they are getting everything they need, even if that’s the smallest thing.”

<https://www.crainsnewyork.com/health-pulse/inside-mamdani-overdose-prevention-center-experiment>