

# Responding to Xylazine: Preparing Police Responders to Assist People Who Use Drugs with Xylazine

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## Background

Xylazine, an animal tranquilizer, is emerging as an adulterant to street drugs and is complicating the response to overdoses and morbidity in people who use drugs (PWUD). In 2021, xylazine was present in 34% of overdose deaths in Philadelphia and detected in over one-third of submitted drug samples in 2022 to the Massachusetts Drug Supply Data Stream. Xylazine users frequently have necrotizing soft tissue wounds

## Objectives

The goals of this project are to:

- 1) Educate public safety and public health personnel about xylazine and its implications to their harm reduction activities
- 2) Facilitate co-development of a local "response plan" in 10 police departments in collaboration with community organizations.

## Methods

This project consisted of:

- 1) Four 1-hour Xylazine webinars delivered to police departments/collaborators
- 2) Focus groups with people who use drugs, harm reduction providers, and clinicians to inform content development
- 3) 3-hour in-person, interactive workshops with 10 police depts and their collaborators to plan a response to xylazine in their communities



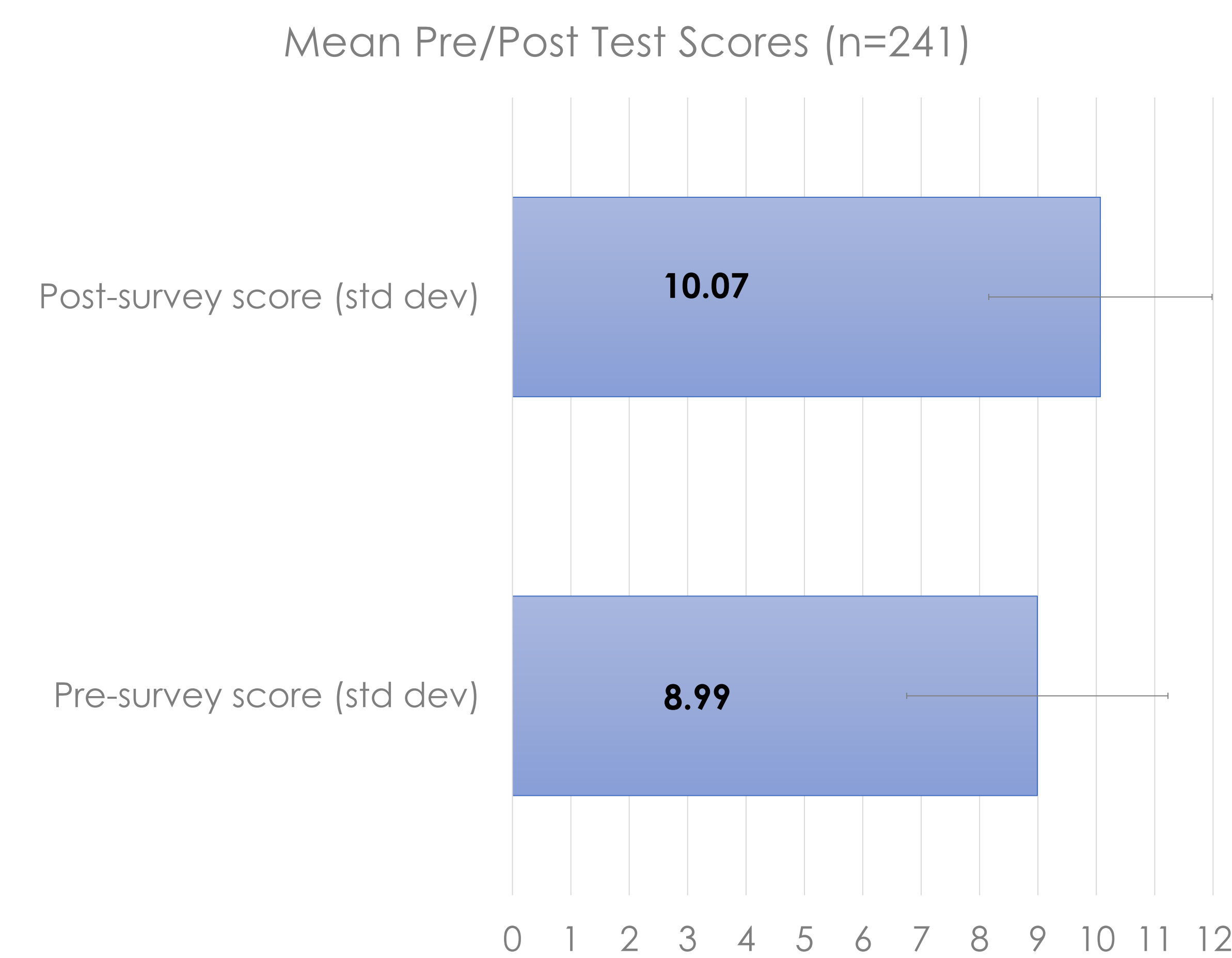
Grant funding for this project is from the 2022 Combating Overdose through Community-Level Intervention (COCLI) initiative, a project operated by the University of Baltimore Center for Drug Policy and Prevention. COCLI initiative funds are provided by the Office of National Drug Control (ONDCP) and the Centers for Disease Control.



## Results

### Webinars

Over 1,000 people from 41 states and Washington, DC registered for the Xylazine 101 webinars and over 600 participants attended. We estimate one-quarter were officers or outreach workers in police departments.



Paired samples t-test (n=241) statistic of 1.08 (CI 0.74, 1.42) increase. Cohen's d .405

### Workshops

We held half day workshops with 83 participants in Beverly, MA; New Bedford, MA; Kingston, MA; Rutland, VT; and Augusta, ME, with attendees from 10 different police departments and community stakeholders that they invited including local health departments, harm reduction agencies and other community agencies. During the workshops, participants worked in small groups to identify the resources and needs of their community related to xylazine and selected interventions to implement. 89.13% were satisfied or very satisfied with the workshop.

### Example Intervention Responses Emerging from Interactive Workshops

- Alert community about xylazine and wounds through posters and social media
- Adapt overdose response protocols to monitor respiration after naloxone, consciousness may not be restored, administer rescue breathing
- To prevent wounds from necrotizing, distribute wound care kits and educational materials on self-care of early wounds – identify non-stigmatized source of care for more severe wounds
- Participate in community drug checking and alert community to results
- Encourage local health clinics and EDs to learn about xylazine effects and treatment of xylazine withdrawal

**Overall, I thought this was a great workshop. I didn't feel overloaded with information, plus I was given the chance to create a plan with other professionals in this field. Even tho[ugh] there are plenty of social workers and police departments working together, I think having us ALL at one workshop is important. Not all communities and police departments operate the same way, so having that chance to discuss different communities (especially around something as important as Xylazine!) is really critical to change and progressive harm reduction opportunities.**

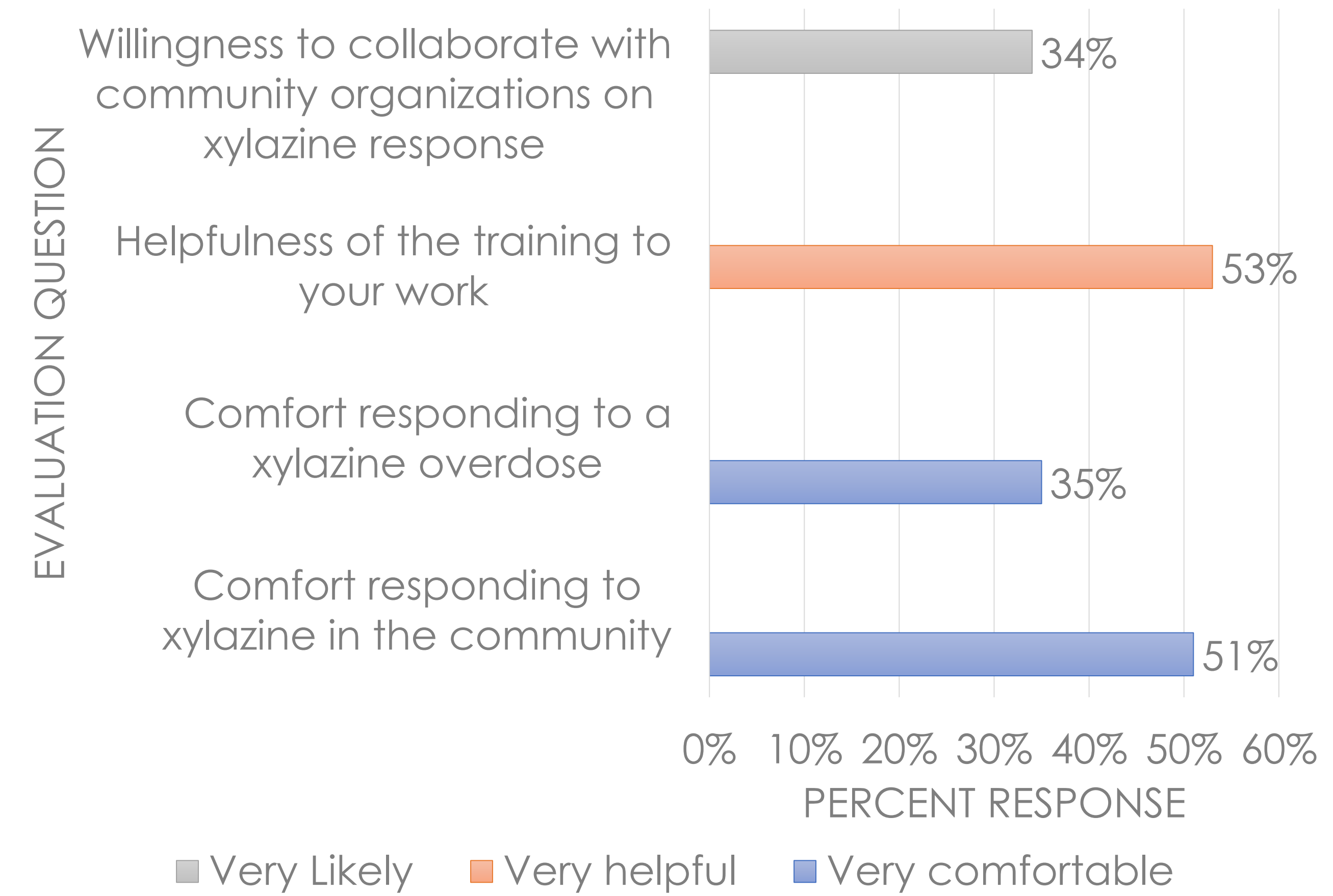
**– Workshop Participant**

### Summary of Focus Group Findings

- PWUD emphasized the importance of being **treated with respect** and that police/EMTs be educated that naloxone does not reverse xylazine overdose (when to stop naloxone)
- PWUD **were receptive to help from police & EMTs** including referrals and wound care kits.
- Informants were concerned that severe withdrawal from fentanyl and xylazine is not treated and kept PWUD from using available services.
- PWUD recommended distribution of **Xylazine test strips** to minimize exposure to xylazine in locales where xylazine was just entering the drug supply.
- PWUD/informants were concerned about wounds that were smelly and rapidly abscessed.

**FEMALE: -- like, not even just EMS, everybody. Like, they kinda look at you like you have a frickin' disease. Like, you're a walking disease...Like, I know we all look like shit. I know some of us smell [laugh] like shit. Like, seriously, that infections stink...They stink. Like, an -- and if the infection -- but it's like -- like, we're people. -- PWUD Focus Group Participant**

Post-survey evaluation of webinar (n=241)



## Conclusion

Police are important stakeholders alongside harm reduction agencies, local and state health departments and other community organizations in responding to xylazine's presence in the illicit drug supply. Communities can work together to respond to xylazine but need more information on wound care and xylazine withdrawal. A coordinated, collaborative response that includes an "educated" police member can reduce morbidity and mortality.

