
WHY ARE DRUG USER HEALTH PROGRAMS IMPORTANT?

Health problems associated with injection drug use can impact the whole community. What are some examples?

- Overdose from opioids are at an all-time high. In 2014, over 1,000 people died as a result of opioid-related overdose in Massachusetts¹
 - In 2015, 85% of all opioid related deaths were due to heroin or illegally manufactured fentanyl.
 - Two out of every three people who died from opioids in 2015 were younger than 44.
- Hepatitis C is on the rise in many communities. Hepatitis C diagnoses in 15-24 year olds have increased by 74% between 2002 and 2009²
- An outbreak of HIV such as the recent one in Indiana is possible³

How do syringe access programs (SAPs) protect community health?

- Hundreds of studies have confirmed the effectiveness of syringe access programs (SAPs) in reducing the spread of HIV, hepatitis C and other blood borne illnesses
- SAPs are incredibly effective in accessing drug users that are not engaged in any form of care.
 - Many drug users do not seek help until a health concern is so advanced that it requires hospitalization. SAPs provide an opportunity to get help in a non-judgmental environment, *before* health concerns become more advanced
- Recovery is not a linear process. Frequent relapse is more the norm than the exception.
 - According to the World Health Organization⁴, SAPs increased entry into treatment, retention of treatment and were associated with “substantially less injecting or cessation of injecting”
- Since establishment of harm reduction programs, new HIV infections attributed to injection drug use have dropped by 92% in Massachusetts between 2002 and 2012⁵

How do SAP's Promote Public Health and Safety?

- SAP's reduce the circulation of contaminated syringes among IDU's, educating and informing participants about the safe disposal of used syringes⁶
- Studies demonstrate that the availability of SAPs in communities results in increased safe disposal of used syringes. For instance, in Portland, Oregon, the number of improperly discarded syringes dropped by almost two-thirds after the implementation of a SAP.⁷

For more information, please contact Liz Whyntott, Director of HIV Health and Prevention at Tapestry: lwhyntott@tapestryhealth.org

¹ The Boston Globe. "Mass. opioid deaths topped 1,000 in 2014." 2015.

² MA DPH. "Shifting Epidemics: HIV and Hepatitis C Infection among Injection Drug Users in Massachusetts." 2012.

³ <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/local/indiana/2016/07/27/ind-could-have-avoided-hiv-outbreak-study-says/87621720/>

⁴ <http://applications.emro.who.int/aiecf/web301.pdf>

⁵ MA DPH. "Shifting Epidemics: HIV and Hepatitis C Infection among Injection Drug Users in Massachusetts." 2012.

⁶ Doherty MC, et al. Discarded needles do not increase soon after the opening of a needle exchange program. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 1997;145(8):730-7.

⁷ Kaplan EH, Heimer R. A circulation theory of needle exchange. *AIDS*. 1994;8(5):567-74.

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Do SAPs Increase Crime or Drug Use?

- SAPs do not encourage the initiation of drug use nor do they increase the frequency of drug use among current users, according to an assessment by the Institute of Medicine.⁸
- The presence of SAPs in communities does not expand drug-related networks or increase crime rates.⁹
 - On the contrary, research has found that neighborhoods in Baltimore with SAPs experienced an 11 percent decrease in break-ins and burglaries, whereas areas of the city without SAPs experienced an 8 percent increase in crime.¹⁰ Another study conducted in Baltimore demonstrated that the number of arrests did not increase after the establishment of SAPs.¹¹

What services are offered at SAPs?

- Routine screening for HIV, Hepatitis C, Syphilis, Chlamydia and Gonorrhea
- Education about and access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- Overdose Education and Nasal Naloxone Distribution
- Drug Treatment Referrals
- Health Insurance Enrollment
- Care Coordination
- Referrals to Services (HIV Medical Care, Primary Care, etc.)
- Syringe Access
- Safe Syringe Disposal

At Tapestry SAPs 46% more Tapestry clients reported using Narcan in a recovery situation in 2015 than 2014. In Holyoke, 87% more syringes were collected and 73% more individual clients were seen in 2015 than in 2014

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⁸ Institute of Medicine. *Preventing HIV Infection Among Injecting Drug Users in High-Risk Countries. An Assessment of the Evidence*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press; 2006.

⁹ Marx MA, et al. Trends in crime and the introduction of a needle exchange program. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2000;90(12):1933–6.

¹⁰ Center for Innovative Public Policies. *Needle Exchange Programs: Is Baltimore a Bust?* Tamarac, FL: CIPP; April 2001

¹¹ Doherty MC, et al. Discarded needles do not increase soon after the opening of a needle exchange program. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 1997;145(8):730–7.