



SYRINGE ACCESS PROGRAMS AND HARM REDUCTION

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

“Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs.” (Harm Reduction Coalition)

For more information about harm reduction, see Fact Sheet 155.

WHAT ARE SYRINGE ACCESS PROGRAMS?

Syringe Access Programs (SAPs) are a harm reduction measure designed to reduce the adverse effects associated with injection drug use. See Fact Sheet 154 for more information on how drug use relates to HIV.

SAPs serve as a way for people who inject drugs (PWID) to receive sterile needles and injection equipment in exchange for their used equipment. Most of these programs provide treatment referrals, testing for blood-borne viruses, and street cleanup opportunities.

A recent study comparing Miami, a city without SAPs, with San Francisco, a city abundant with SAPs, found that there were eight times more discarded used syringes on the streets of Miami, even though Miami has only half as many injection drug users as San Francisco.

Studies have also shown SAPs to be effective in reducing the transmission of blood-borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C (see Fact Sheet 507) through their exchange program. By reducing the reuse and sharing of needles, SAPs prevent injection-related bacterial infections, reduce cases of fatal overdose, and improve community safety.

Additionally, SAPs act in a cost-effective manner. By focusing on prevention, they reduce the medical costs associated with lifetime treatment

of HIV (see Fact Sheet 403) or treatment/cure of hepatitis C virus.

WHO SHOULD CONSIDER SYRINGE ACCESS AND HARM REDUCTION?

Syringe access and harm reduction should be considered by anyone interested in reducing the adverse effects of injection drug use. These programs are beneficial for improving public health and safety.

Syringe access and harm reduction serve as ways for PWIDs and non-drug users to be empowered, responsible, and helpful members of their community.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SYRINGE ACCESS AND HARM REDUCTION?

SAPs significantly reduce the rates of HIV and hepatitis C virus infection in their communities, reduce unsafe needle disposal, protect law enforcement, improve the safety of the community, and empower people who inject drugs to take care of their bodies, support each other, and educate one another.

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS ABOUT SYRINGE ACCESS AND HARM REDUCTION?

A major criticism of SAPs and other harm reduction measures is that they enable drug use and cause more crime in the area. However, both of these claims have been proven to be false time and time again.

In reality, the main drawback of SAPs is that they lack the resources and support to meet the entire needs of their community. Ultimately, a Supervised Injection Facility (SIF) may be necessary to prevent overdose and public injection, both of which are not adequately addressed by syringe access programs.

You can find out more information about Supervised Injection Facilities and their benefits here.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Syringe Access Programs and harm reduction are pragmatic measures to address the adverse effects associated with injection drug use. They are beneficial for people who inject drugs, as well as those who live and work in communities that experience injection drug use.

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