

Access to Safe Use Supplies for Less Harmful Drug Use

Programs that provide safer supplies to support less harmful use of drugs – such as sterile syringes, smoking equipment, cookers, drug testing supplies and basic first aid items – are essential to reduce the harms associated with drug use. These materials help prevent injury, disease, and death for people who use drugs and do not increase crime or drug use in communities they are available.

Despite these facts, harm reduction programs distributing syringes and other safer use supplies face many obstacles while they attempt to fill a critical public health need. In fact, 11 states ban such programs outright. In several others, state law does nothing to protect such programs or their participants from prosecution under local laws. Even where such programs are permitted, funding is a severe challenge. Most currently available sources of federal funding explicitly exclude the purchase of syringes, and many states adopt the same restrictions. As a consequence of these and other obstacles, only a minority of US counties have a syringe or safer use supplies program.

Research decisively supports the critical need for and public health importance of syringe and safer use supplies for people who use drugs.

Access to supplies reduces overdose risk and supports less harmful drug use:

- Syringe service programs (SSP) [help prevent overdose deaths](#) by teaching people who inject drugs how to prevent overdose and how to recognize, respond to, and reverse a drug overdose.
- Fentanyl test strips [encourage safer behaviors](#) that reduce the risk of death from overdose. A positive test for fentanyl allows and encourages people to [safeguard against overdose](#), for example by using less, going slower, or asking someone to check on them.
- Access to safer smoking supplies through harm reduction programs [reduces injecting drug use](#), and also reduces frequency of pipe sharing.
- Among participants who received safer smoking supplies at a syringe services program, 85% reported [smoking when they would otherwise have injected](#) on one or more occasions.

Safer use supplies help to prevent infectious disease transmission and improve health outcomes:

- Syringe service programs are associated with a [50% reduction](#) in HIV transmission.
- The CDC supports a [needs-based approach](#) to provide sterile syringes based on expressed need, rather than on a one-for-one basis, as the best practice model.
- Syringe access should be a component of any [public health strategy to prevent HIV transmission](#). Greater access to programs [reduces HIV risk behaviors](#) like sharing or reusing of equipment.
- Distribution of safer smoking supplies through health service programs reduces [health problems and injuries](#) like cuts and burns from pipes, or ingestion of steel wool particles or other debris that can cause internal damage.
- Switching from injecting to smoking drugs supports an [overall improvement of health](#), including reductions in soft tissue infections and in overdose risk.

8x

In cities without programs, people were **eight times more likely** to improperly dispose syringes.

Programs distributing syringes and other supplies for less harmful drug use do not increase crime or reduce public safety, and do improve safe disposal of syringes.

- Comparison of two large U.S. cities, one with and one without syringe services programs, found [eight times more improperly disposed syringes](#) in the city without programs.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse highlights findings showing that syringe services programs [do not increase drug use, crime, or syringe litter in communities](#).
- Implementing a syringe services program does [not increase crime or injecting drug use](#) in that community, and [does not result in an increase in arrests](#) for drug possession, violent crime, or assaults against police.

5x

People were **five times more likely** to enter drug treatment with access to a safer use supplies program.

Access to safer use supplies programs increases engagement with other services:

- New SSP participants are [five times more likely](#) to enter drug treatment and three times more likely to reduce or stop their drug use than those who don't enter such programs.
- Syringe services programs serve as an [effective, low-barrier point of entry](#) for people seeking medications for opioid use disorders (MOUDs) treatment.

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