







Understanding Needle Syringe Programs

Harm reduction practices support the needs of people who use substances. The overall aim is to reduce the harms associated with substance use, including preventing transmission of infections such as HIV and Hepatitis C.¹ Needle Syringe Programs support this philosophy and offer a connection to health and social services, including referrals to substance use treatment.

Benefits of Needle Syringe Programs^{2,3}:

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|  | Information-sharing on safer substance use and safer sex practices |  | Reduced overdoses, toxicities, deaths, and reliance on acute health services |
|  | Reduced transmission of STIs and blood-borne infections, reduced skin/soft tissue/ cardiac infections |  | Less discarded sharps in community, improved community safety and order |
|  | Increased access to other health and social services and availability of outreach services where people are at |  | Empowerment, autonomy and a non-judgmental environment for people who use substances to find support and connection |

Summary of Best Practice Recommendations⁴:

- Offer variety of supplies for safer sex and substance use (eg, condoms, lubricant, pipes, straws, needles, cookers, etc).
- Offer safer use supplies in the quantities and formats requested by clients without limiting number of supplies provided.
- Encourage but do not require clients to return used equipment (ie, used needles or glass pipes) in order to receive new supplies. One-for-one needle exchange is not recommended and can put people at risk of negative consequences from sharing or reusing equipment.
- Offer education on a variety of harm reduction topics (eg, safer substance use practices, overdose prevention and management, safer handling and disposal of used equipment, safer sex practices, etc), in a variety of formats (eg, one-on-one education, workshops and group education, physical resources like pamphlets, and peer-led education).
- Offer services using a variety of program delivery models (eg, fixed and mobile sites) with consideration for geographic location (eg, rural access points), hours of operation, and staff and peer-based services including outreach.
- Offer means of safe disposal of used equipment by offering biohazard sharps disposal containers, community sharps bins, and accepting used sharps for safe disposal.
- Ensure safe handling, storage, transportation, and disposal of biohazardous material per local and provincial guidelines.
- Offer variety of services including basic first aid, wound care, immunizations, testing and treatment of sexually transmitted/blood-borne infections, and HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis.
- Refer clients to other agencies for health and social services.

Interested in becoming a satellite NSP distribution site? Requests for new NSP sites are determined by consideration of various factors, including geographic location and proximity to other NSPs, accessibility to clients and hours of operation, ability of the agency to incur the costs of sharps disposal, health unit funding availability for the purchase of supplies, and commitment to the provisions within the shared service agreement. [Contact us](#) to learn more!

1. Canadian Mental Health Association. Harm reduction. Canadian Mental Health Association. 2024. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://ontario.cmha.ca/harm-reduction/>
2. North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. Needle syringe program. North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. 2022. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/public-health-services/needle-syringe-program.aspx>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Summary of information on the safety and effectiveness of syringe services programs (SSPs). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated January 11, 2023. Accessed March 28, 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-summary.html>
4. Strike C, Miskovic M, Perri M, Xavier J, Edgar J, Buxton J, Challacombe L, Gohil H, Hopkins S, Leece P, Watson, T, Zurba N and the Working Group on Best Practice for Harm Reduction Programs in Canada. *Best Practice Recommendations for Canadian Programs that Provide Harm Reduction Supplies to People Who Use Drugs and are at Risk for HIV, HCV, and Other Harms: 2021*. Toronto, ON: Working Group on Best Practice for Harm Reduction Programs in Canada. 2021. Accessed March 28, 2024. https://www.catie.ca/sites/default/files/2021-11/3382_CATIE_CarolStrike_BestPracticeRecommendations_2021-EN-Final.pdf