



AIDS ADVOCACY  
NETWORK

# SYRINGE EXCHANGE TOOLKIT

INCREASING AWARENESS OF  
AND ADVOCACY FOR SYRINGE  
EXCHANGE PROGRAMS (SEPS)  
AND OTHER HARM REDUCTION  
STRATEGIES



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- SEPs quick facts about their benefits/statistics/facts
  - What is a Syringe Exchange Program?
    - Community-based clinics/programs that provide access to sterile, free syringes and safe disposal of used syringes.
    - Established in the 1980s
    - Focuses on harm reduction rather than enforcing abstinence
    - Provides comprehensive harm reduction services such as
      - Sterile needles, syringes, and other injection equipment
      - Safe disposal containers for needles and syringes
      - HIV and hepatitis testing and linkage to treatment
      - Education about overdose prevention and safer injection practices
      - Referral to substance use disorder treatment, including medication-assisted treatment
      - Referral to medical, mental health, and social services
      - Tools to prevent HIV, STD, and viral hepatitis including counseling, condoms, and vaccinations
      - Abscess and wound care
  - Why do we need them?
    - Harm reduction, eg sites equipped to manage an overdose
    - Shown to prevent HIV and Hep C transmission
    - Serves as an important link to critical medical services and programs (eg. PrEP, PEP, Hep A & C vaccinations, STD/TB screening, etc)
  - Why do we need to fight for it?
    - Not available in all 50 states
      - They are illegal in some states
    - There's more to be done. It must be recognized that IV drug use is widespread across all socioeconomic spectrums. See Austin, Indiana as an example that IV drug use in rural communities are present and increasing.
    - Death from opioid overdose has steadily increased almost every year since 2001, surpassing gun homicide and traffic accidents in cause of death
    - Only recently, in 2016, through committed actions from various organizations, community leaders, and SSP supporters, the federal ban on funding for domestic and international SSPs (reinstated in December 2011) was reversed.
- What is Harm reduction?
  - Include the following activities:

- Designated drivers
  - Syringe exchange programs
  - Safe injection sites
  - Methadone maintenance programs
  - Interventions can also include: Counseling, education, and referrals for health care
- Definition:
  - A practical approach to drug use, recognizes that quitting drugs may not be realistic or even desirable for everyone.
  - Harm reduction strategies are community-based, user-driven, non-judgmental and are broad based in that they address systems which isolate and marginalize people.
- Studies have proven that harm reduction interventions do not:
  - Increase drug use
  - Negatively impact upon drug treatment
  - So not increase the rates of injecting equipment (needles) in the streets
- Benefits:
  - Syringe exchange programs work!
- SEP quick facts about their funding
  - Banning purchase of syringes increases stigma around SEPs
  - SEPs remain difficult to establish and fund
  - The Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 includes language that gives states and local communities meeting certain criteria the opportunity to use federal funds provided through the Department of Health and Human Services to support certain components of SSPs, with the exception of provision of needles, syringes, or other equipment used solely for the purposes of illicit drug use.
- Syringe exchange programs lead to:
  - Increased cleaning of used needles
  - Decreased sharing of needles
  - Fewer instances of risky sexual behavior
  - Higher likelihood of referrals to drug abuse treatment
    - 5 times as likely to enter treatment for substance use disorder compared to non-participants
  - A future where there is less drug abuse
  - Reduce overdose deaths
    - Teach PWID how to prevent and respond to drug overdose
    - Also learn how to use naloxone, a medication used to reverse overdose
  - Reduce needlestick injuries

- Protect Law Enforcement Personnel from needle stick injuries
- DO not increase crime or drug use
  - On the contrary, research has found that neighborhoods in Baltimore with SEPs experienced an 11 percent decrease in break-ins and burglaries, whereas areas of the city without SEPs experienced an 8 percent increase in crime.<sup>20</sup> Another study conducted in Baltimore demonstrated that the number of arrests did not increase after the establishment of SEPs.

#### Reducing the stigma around syringe exchange

- WE should not dehumanize suffers of addiction and understand the nature of drug use across demographics and communities. The wellbeing of every person in a community is important.
- We should not use the term "Needle giveaways"
- Injection drug users should not be stigmatized but related with respect and dignity while encouraging safer injecting practices through sterile water, alcohol wipes, condoms, and relevant health information regarding substance abuse
- Banning funding for syringe exchange programs creates a stigma around using the program

#### Get involved!!

- How to get involved:
  - Awareness
    - Host an informational session at your school
    - Post infographic on page
  - Local syringe exchange site
  - Volunteer at the site
  - Sign petitions
  - Talk to legislators/representatives to get funding support, providing medical staff, helping with advertising
  - Meet with your senator or house representatives
  - Send emails/letters
    - Template:
      - “Hi, I’m a constituent and a medical student from [insert city] calling with the 30,000-member American Medical Student Association. I am calling to ask [Senator or Representative’s name] to support [HR2569 or S1365], the Comprehensive Addiction Resources Emergency (CARE)

Act. As a future physician, I support CARE Act because it will guarantee, high-quality, affordable, and equitable healthcare for all my future patients. It is important to know that drug addiction is a medical problem that requires treatment and compassion, not a prison sentence. [Insert a personal story.] Will the [Senator/Representative] support expanded funding for treatment programs for Americans struggling with addiction by co-sponsoring the CARE Act? Thank you for your time and for considering my request for your support.”

- Make phone calls
- Write an Op-ed
- Advocate for your own local SEP
- Advocate for more widespread permanent syringe disposal in cities and communities, the availability of needle pickups, and quick access to care through hotlines, email addresses, and social media.
  - Can also advocate for conducting disposal sweeps in syringe litter hotspots.

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# **SYRING EXCHANGE PROGRAMS**

## **What are the benefits of a Syringe Exchange Program (SEP)?**

- Decreased sharing of needles
- Higher likelihood of referrals to drug abuse treatment
- Reduced overdose death
- Reduced needle-stick injuries
- Does not increase drug use or crime rate
- The cost of providing clean syringes is less than the cost of treating HIV/AIDS

## **SEPs remain difficult to establish and fund TAKE ACTION!!!**

- ★ Sign petitions
- ★ Talk to legislators to get funding
- ★ Volunteer at SEP sites
- ★ Send emails/letters and make phone calls

**Support and follow our page  
for more info on how to get  
involved!**

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# NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION ON SYRINGE EXCHANGE

**March 21st**

This day is dedicated to educate the public about the life-saving importance of sterile needles and syringe exchange programs. This day has also been recognized to advocate for increased funding support and availability of proper syringe disposal in the community.

## TAKE ACTION!

- Call your senators
- Send emails/letters
- Meet with your senators or house representatives
- Use social media to contact your senators/legislators



When using social media, use the following hashtags to bring awareness to the cause:

#NationalDayOfActionOnSyringeExchange  
#DayOfActionOnSyringeExchange



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**amsa**  
American Medical Student Association

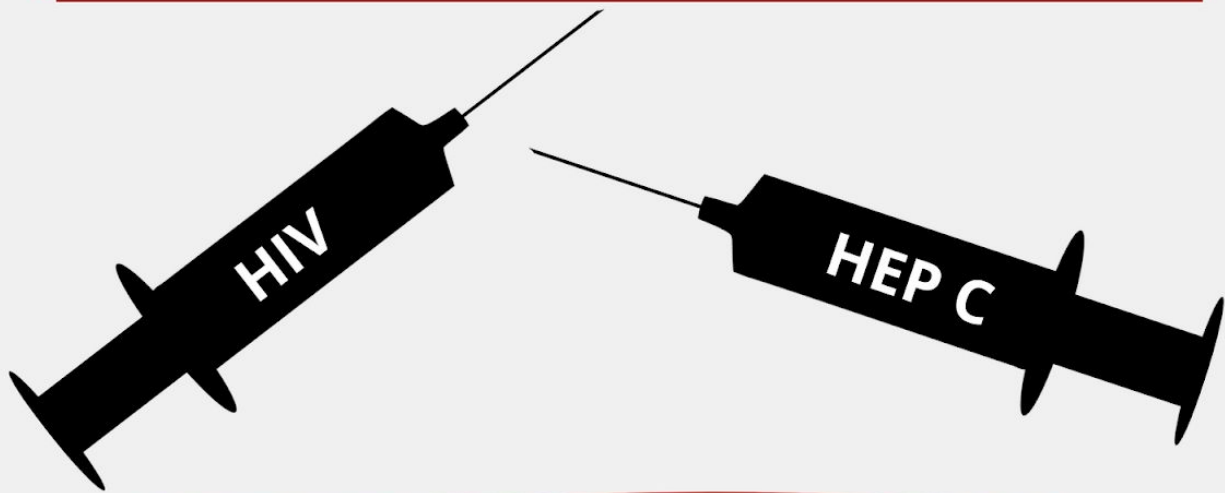
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# Syringe Exchange Programs (SEPs)

## Myths vs Facts

Source: [amfAR.org](http://amfAR.org)



### **Myth 1: SEPs only give out needles**

- SEPs safely dispose of used needles
- Test and treat for HIV and Hepatitis C
- Offers referrals to medical, mental health, and social services
- Abscess and wound care

### **Myth 2: SEPs increase injection drug use**

- Offers referrals to substance use disorder (SUD) treatment
- SEP participants are 5x more likely to enter treatment for SUD
- In Seattle, IDUs who had used SEPs reported a 75% decrease injection drug use



### **Myth 3: SEPs undermine public safety**

- In New York City, the establishment of SEPs was correlated with a 78% decrease in HIV among IDUs
- In Baltimore, neighborhoods with SEPs saw an 11% decrease in crimes

### **Myth 4: Establishing SEPs is too expensive**

- The cost of a clean syringe is just 72 cents. Treating HIV/AIDS over a lifetime costs an average of \$300,000



### **Myth 5: SEPs are fully supported by federal funding**

- The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018 does not allow funds to be used to purchase needles or syringes.




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# PEER- DELIVERED SYRINGE EXCHANGE

## What is peer-delivered syringe exchange?

- A stable peer network where a "designated exchanger" provides, loans, or sells syringes to peers on an as needed basis
- This can be a friend, family member, partner, or associates
- Peer-delivered syringe exchange practices results in an increased number of sterile syringes circulating in the community
- Sterile syringes are more available to individuals with limited accessibility

## Limitations of Traditional SEPs

There are many structural barriers that can limit one's accessibility to sterile syringes:

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- Fear of targeting by law enforcement
- Privacy concerns (Not wanting to be identified publicly as an IDU)
- Inconvenient or inaccessible hours of exchange
- Lack of consistent transportation
- Disability (such as disease, injury, and mental illness)
- Homelessness
- Legal status (such as probationer, parolee, fear of outstanding warrants)

**78.3% of SEP participants report sharing extra sterile syringes with a close friend**

- Determination of Need
- A list of SEPs
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/determination-of-need-for-ssp.html>
- Social media outreach
  - Hashtag ideas
    - #NeedleExchange
    - #HarmReduction
    - #SafeInjection
    - #HIVPrevention
    - #HCVPrevention
    - #SyringeExchangeAwareness
    - #SyringeExchange
    - #SyringeExchangePrograms
    - #SyringeAccess
- Important Dates
  - December 1st as a "Day of Action"
  - National Day of Action on Syringe exchange
    - March 21
    - A day to educate the public about the life-saving importance of sterile needles and syringe exchange programs
    - Hashtags:
      - #NationalDayOfActionOnSyringeExchange
      - #DayOfActionOnSyringeExchange
    - This is a day to increase awareness for syringe access through protest, advocacy, and calls to senators
- Groups to follow/Allied Organization
  - Coalition for syringe access
    - <http://www.coalitionforsyringeaccess.org/>
  - Harm Reduction Coalition
  - The Exchange Project
  - AIDS United
  - Drug Policy Alliance
  - North American Syringe Exchange Network