

NACo & Pew Harm Reduction Listening Session

Evidence and data on harm reduction interventions

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June 26, 2024

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Overview of harm reduction

What is it? Why is it important?

What is harm reduction?

- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services defines harm reduction as “Helping people where they are, without judgment, stigma, or discrimination.”¹
- General idea is to decrease negative consequences associated with behaviors or activities
 - Examples: sunscreen, helmets, seatbelts, and syringes

Sources:

1. <https://www.hhs.gov/overdose-prevention/harm-reduction>



Why is harm reduction important for substance use disorder?

- There are negative consequences associated with substance use, including death, overdose, and infectious disease transmission
- Harm reduction can help decrease these negative consequences and save lives
- Emerged in the public health field as a response to HIV/AIDS
- Has grown to respond to issues including hepatitis C and overdoses
- Has worked to provide services to people that need them

Harm reduction interventions

Evidence and data

Naloxone

- Naloxone is a medication that reverses the respiratory depression caused by an opioid overdose
- Naloxone:
 - Reduces the rate of opioid overdose deaths
 - Can be safely administered by medical professionals and by lay people
 - Does not increase non-medical opioid use

Source: <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2020/10/expanded-access-to-naloxone-can-curb-opioid-overdose-deaths>

Naloxone

- As of September 2023, all 50 states and Washington, D.C. have enacted some form of naloxone access law¹
- At the county-level, these laws can determine:
 - Who can issue a standing order (e.g., county health officer)
 - Who can dispense or distribute naloxone (e.g., county health department)
 - Protections for laypeople who administer naloxone (e.g., county employees)
 - Where naloxone can/must be made available (e.g., schools)
 - Whether naloxone administration must be reported (e.g., in state's PDMP)

Sources:

1. <https://legislativeanalysis.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Opioid-Antagonist-Access-Summary-of-State-Laws.pdf>

Naloxone

- Enacting naloxone access laws reduced the incidence of opioid overdose deaths by 14 percent in the 28 states that passed laws by the end of 2014¹
 - In these states, the incidence of opioid overdose deaths decreased by 23 percent among African Americans
 - Naloxone access laws do not increase non-medical opioid use
- Naloxone standing orders are strongly related to decreases in fatal synthetic opioid overdoses²

Sources:

1. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29610001/>
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9834937/#:~:text=Conclusion%3A,synthetic%20opioid%20overdose%20death%20rate>

Syringe services programs

- Provide access to free, new, sterile syringes and other equipment and disposal services¹
- Often offer other services, such as:²
 - Linkage to care or treatment for substance use disorders
 - Vaccination, testing, linkage to care, and treatment for infectious diseases
 - Education on harm reduction, preventing overdoses, and wound care
 - Naloxone

Sources:

1. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2021/03/syringe-distribution-programs-can-improve-public-health-during-the-opioid-overdose-crisis>
2. <https://www.hiv.gov/federal-response/policies-issues/syringe-services-programs/>

Syringe services programs

- Over 30 years of peer-reviewed research demonstrate that syringe services programs:
 - Reduce rates of HIV and hepatitis C by 50%, and by more than two-thirds when combined with medication for opioid use disorder treatment¹
 - Save lives²
 - Increase proper disposal of used syringes³
 - Build trust with participants and reduce stigma⁴
 - Increase participants' engagement with treatment (participants are five times more likely to enter substance use treatment and three times more likely to stop using drugs than those who do not use syringe service programs)²
 - Save money⁵

Sources:

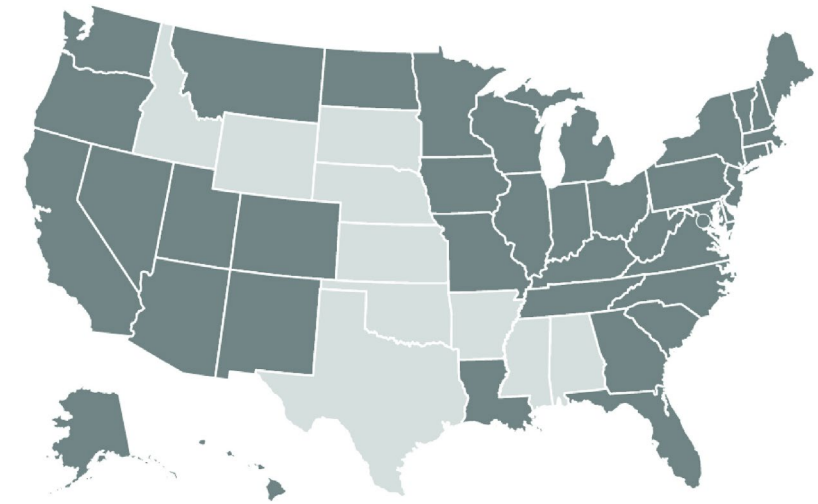
1. <https://www.hiv.gov/federal-response/policies-issues/syringe-services-programs/>
2. [https://www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/index.html#:~:text=SSPs%20are%20associated%20with%20an,as%20medication%20assisted%20treatment\).](https://www.cdc.gov/syringe-services-programs/php/index.html#:~:text=SSPs%20are%20associated%20with%20an,as%20medication%20assisted%20treatment).)
3. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2021/03/syringe-distribution-programs-can-improve-public-health-during-the-opioid-overdose-crisis>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7393740/>
5. https://journals.lww.com/jaids/Fulltext/2019/12012/Using_Interrupted_Time_Series_Analysis_to_Measure.14.aspx

Syringe services programs

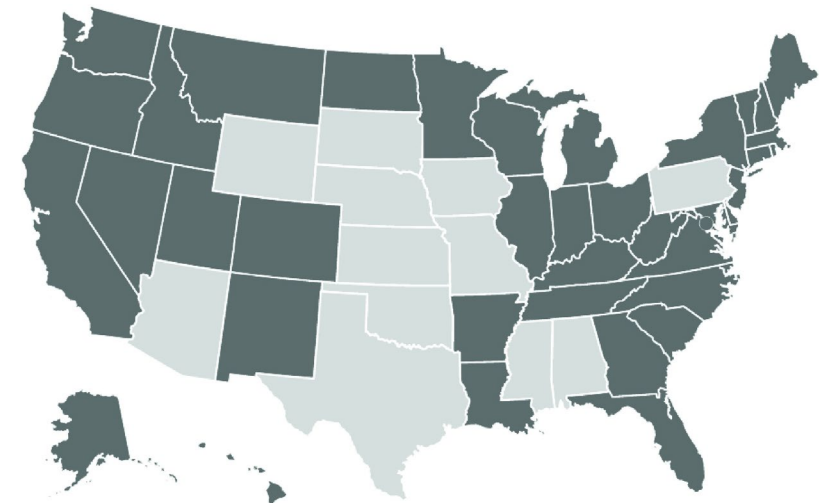
- Syringe services programs do not:¹
 - Increase crime in areas surrounding the programs
 - Initiate new drug use or drug use among youth
- As of 2019:
 - 41 states have syringe services programs¹
 - 462 syringe services programs operate at the local level.²
 - Of these, at least 87 operate at the county-level
 - 39 states have laws that remove legal impediments to, explicitly authorize, and/or regulate syringe services programs¹

Sources

1. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0033354920921817#bibr5-0033354920921817>
2. <https://nasen.org/>



● States where SSPs are operating



● States where laws explicitly authorize or are consistent with the legal operation of SSPs

Drug checking equipment

- Fentanyl test strips are used to detect the presence of fentanyl in a person's drug supply¹
- Research has shown that fentanyl test strips:
 - Effectively identify fentanyl in the drug supply²
 - Help people take measures to prevent an overdose²
 - Modify drug use and are associated with behavior change²
 - Are easy to use and people are interested in using them³
- Compared to 462 programs providing syringe services at the local level, only 277 provide fentanyl test strips⁴

Sources:

1. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2020/10/opioid-overdose-crisis-compounded-by-polysubstance-use>
2. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30292493/>
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6701177/>
4. <https://nasen.org/>

Summarizing key points

Takeaways

Key points

- Harm reduction decreases negative consequences associated with behaviors or activities
- Harm reduction is a person-centered approach
- For substance use, can reduce adverse health outcomes (infectious disease transmission, overdose, etc.)
- Saves lives
- Saves money
- Syringe service programs can connect people to treatment and other services

What is the role of state and local policymakers?

- State policies govern important aspects of harm reduction interventions
 - Details can affect access and effectiveness
 - State laws can reflect evidence and best practices, but local barriers may remain
- States can authorize and fund harm reduction programs
 - Can provide funding for effective interventions
 - Local officials have a powerful voice in influencing these state policies