



The Importance of Syringe Exchange Programs

Notable Quotes from Current and Past Policy Makers

Syringe exchange programs are supported by major medical and public health organizations, including the American Medical Association, the American Public Health Association, the National Academy of Sciences, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, as well as the American Bar Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and the International Red Cross-Red Crescent Society.

President Barack Obama

“I believe needle exchange is another important method of the prevention of HIV/AIDS transmission.”

— *Response to AIDS VOTE.ORG presidential candidate questionnaire, 2008*

“When it comes to prevention, we do not have to choose between values and science.... We should lift the federal ban on needle exchange, which could dramatically reduce rates of infection among drug users.”

— *Open letter to LGBT Americans, November 2007*

Harold Varmus, M.D.

Nobel Laureate, Co-chair, President’s Council of Advisers on Science and Technology, and former Director, National Institutes of Health

“An exhaustive review of the science in this area indicates that needle exchange programs can be an effective component in the global effort to end the epidemic of HIV disease.”

— *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services press release, April 20, 1998*

“Early in 1998, I assembled the published studies...and was convinced that there was strong data favoring reduced transmission of lethal viruses by needle-exchange programs.... As it turned out, everyone lost: we didn’t get our policy change, drug abusers didn’t get help from the federal government....”

— *Reflecting on the Clinton administration’s failure to repeal the federal ban on syringe exchange funding, from his book The Art and Politics of Science, 2009*

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Administrator,
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

“I’ll be looking at all of the issues, and seeing what makes sense and where....It’s clear to me that syringe exchange has played an important role in reducing the HIV epidemic in New York City.”

— Atlanta Journal Constitution, *June 6, 2009*

Howard Koh, M.D., M.P.H.
Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

“[Syringe exchange] programs are wise public-health ventures, often providing the only link between abusers, health-care providers, and treatment programs.”

—Boston Globe, *October 2002, when Dr. Koh was Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health*

Margaret Hamburg, M.D.
Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration

“A growing body of evidence indicates that needle exchange reduces the HIV risk, leads participants to avoid needle sharing and practice safer sex, and encourages them to enter treatment.”

—New York Times, *November 12, 1991, when Dr. Hamburg was New York City Health Commissioner*

R. Gil Kerlikowske, M.A.
Director, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, and former police chief of Seattle

“Needle exchange programs have been proven to reduce the transmission of blood borne diseases. A number of studies conducted in the U.S. have shown needle exchange programs do not increase drug use. I understand that research has shown these programs, when implemented in the context of a comprehensive program that offers other services such as referral to counseling, healthcare, drug treatment, HIV/AIDS prevention, counseling and testing, are effective at connecting addicted users to drug treatment.”

— *Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing, April 2009*

Anthony Fauci, M.D.
Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health

“Clearly needle exchange programs work. There is no doubt about that.”

— *Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform, September 16, 2008*

Jeffrey H. Crowley, M.P.H.
Director, White House Office of National AIDS Policy

“The President is looking forward to working with Congress and the American people to build support for this change, and his administration is committed to moving forward to address the federal ban on syringe exchange programs as a part of a national HIV/AIDS strategy.”

—*Time Magazine, May 16, 2009*

Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D.
Principal Deputy Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration

“Syringe exchange is now accepted as a proven intervention by all the respected scientific authorities....It’s successful at getting people to treatment,...it’s successful against HIV.”

—*Kaiser Family Foundation transcript, June 2006, when Dr. Sharfstein was Baltimore Commissioner of Health*

Eric Goosby, M.D.
U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Ambassador-at-Large

“It is time for us to increase our efforts to engage in the hard but honest discussions about the realities of prevention and not shy away from efforts to reach the most-at-risk populations, like men who have sex with men and injection drug users.”

— *Confirmation hearing, 2009*

President William J. Clinton

In 2006, when asked if he regretted his decision not to support needle exchange, the former president admitted that he did. “I was wrong,” Mr. Clinton said at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Spain. “The evidence shows that [syringe exchange] doesn’t lead to increased drug usage.”

—*Wall Street Journal, July 12, 2006*

Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Secretary of State

“I think that we should go with the science and the science has been pretty clear on [syringe exchange].... [I]f the states and localities are willing to do it, the federal government will support it.”

—*Lesbian and Gay New York, October 2000*