

Fact Sheet

Syringe Services Programs in California: An Overview

Since the late 1980s, California syringe services programs (SSPs) have been providing sterile syringes, collecting used ones, and acting as points of access to health care and help for people who use drugs. SSPs play a critical role in California's approach to infectious disease prevention, and have been instrumental in sharply reducing HIV infections in the state and preventing transmission of other blood-borne diseases. SSPs now serve as the frontline care providers in California's ongoing efforts to stop drug overdose deaths.

As of September 2022:

- There are 65 SSPs operating in [33 counties in California](#).
- California SSPs offer many services in addition to providing sterile injection equipment. These usually include overdose education and naloxone distribution, HIV and hepatitis C testing, and referrals to drug treatment, housing, and mental health services. Most SSPs also provide first aid and basic supplies, such as clean socks and bottled water, to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- California SSPs serve over 100,000 people a year in a variety of settings, including clinics, mobile vans, storefronts, health departments and churches. Some offer street-based services in multiple locations, others offer services daily during standard business hours, and many provide home delivery.
- SSPs have played a central role in steeply reducing HIV transmission in California, reducing hepatitis B and C virus transmission, and preventing skin and soft tissue infections among people who inject drugs. Research shows that SSPs participants are five times more likely to enter drug treatment¹ and three times more likely to reduce or stop injecting than those who have never accessed an SSP².
- Since 1999 the California Legislature and each successive governor have acted to expand access to these services: by funding supplies and staffing, by dedicating funds to start new SSPs and by [changing laws](#) that had prohibited syringe exchange and penalized individuals for possession of safer drug using supplies.
- Most SSPs in California receive authorization from local governments. Organizations may also [apply directly to the California Department of Public Health for authorization](#). SSPs in health clinics usually operate under physician authority.
- Syringe services are endorsed by every major medical and public health association in the U.S. and internationally, including by the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, and the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

¹Hagan H, McGough JP, Thiede H, Hopkins S, Duchin J, Alexander ER, "Reduced injection frequency and increased entry and retention in drug treatment associated with needle-exchange participation in Seattle drug injectors", *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 2000; 19:247-252.

²Strathdee, S.A., Celentano, D.D., Shah, N., Lyles, C., Stambolis, V.A., Macal, G., Nelson, K., Vlahov, D., "Needle-exchange attendance and health care utilization promote entry into detoxification", *J Urban Health* 1999; 76(4):448-60.