

# Syringe Access Exchange Program: Proposed Program for Northern Kentucky

## PROGRAM GOALS

- Reduce transmission of diseases and infections spread by injection drug use.
- Reduce the amount of contaminated needles and syringes improperly discarded in the community.
- Act as an access point for individuals to obtain connections to treatment for substance use disorders, health care, counseling and other social services.

## HOW WILL THE PROGRAM OPERATE?

Northern Kentucky's program has been modeled after similar successful programs throughout the country. It uses a cost-effective approach with best practices for disease prevention by utilizing existing staff and health centers already set up for providing services to this population.

- The program would be **open to anyone** who uses injection drugs. Exchange of needles would be provided anonymously; however, other health services, such as laboratory testing for hepatitis C, HIV, syphilis and pregnancy, and immunizations will be provided confidentially.
- Most participants will **come weekly for clean syringes and other services**. It's estimated that the program will serve about 800 individuals annually across the four-county Northern Kentucky district. With four locations and weekly visits, it's estimated that sites will see up to 10 participants per hour when the program is operating. The Health Department already handles much larger programs in its health centers—the WIC nutritional supplement program serves more than 8,000 participants annually.
- Most services provided through the syringe access exchange program will be **free of charge**. Clinical services beyond the exchange of equipment and rapid testing for hepatitis and HIV may be billed per the regular sliding scale fee or to a third party payor if participant is enrolled. No participant will be turned away for inability to pay.
- Current plans call for the program to operate during **regular business hours**, with designated times set for each county health center, based on expected use.
- Clinic flow has been analyzed at each health center, and syringe access exchange services are designed to have **minimal interruption** to other health center services. Participants for syringe access will follow a separate streamlined process for services.
- All participants will be required to agree to a list of **Participant Rights and Responsibilities**. Items covered by this policy include safely disposing of contaminated equipment and refraining from drug use on Health Department property. Violations can result in dismissal from the program.

## *7 Things to Know about a Northern Kentucky Syringe Access Exchange Program*

1. Reflects the Health Department's duty to stop the spread of infectious diseases - required by state law.
2. Is a highly effective public health intervention that stops the spread of hepatitis B, C, and HIV.
3. Provides access to health care, including counseling, testing and treatment.
4. Increases likelihood of entering treatment for a substance use disorder.
5. Helps remove dirty needles from public spaces, thus reducing the public's risk of accidental needlesticks.
6. Cost effective with a 1:7 return on investment.
7. Important component of Northern Kentucky's overall response to the heroin epidemic.

- **Specially trained Health Department nurses will staff the program**, with one nurse at each site serving as the primary provider. If client volume for syringe access is higher, additional staff can be assigned to assist with the program. If client volume for syringe access is low, the nurse can provide other public health services to other clients of the health center.
- Participants in the syringe access exchange program will be offered a variety of **referrals for other health and social services**, including
  - Treatment for a substance use disorder
  - Other Health Department programs such as HIV case management, sexually transmitted disease treatment, family planning, etc.
  - Primary medical care
  - Mental health care
  - Health insurance enrollment for those who are eligible for coverage

## EVALUATION

As with any new program, the Health Department will closely evaluate the syringe access exchange program to ensure the program is working and to drive any changes that need to be made. Data will be shared with the District Board of Health as well as others in the community. Items to be tracked include:

- Number of unduplicated participants with demographics such as age, ZIP code of residence and gender
- Frequency of intravenous injection
- Estimated number of needles brought to the exchange for proper disposal
- Number of needles issued
- Number of vaccines provided
- Number of tests for syphilis, HIV, hepatitis C and pregnancy, and rates of positivity for each
- Number of participants entering treatment for substance use disorders
- Number of participants enrolled in health insurance coverage through kynect
- Number of police and/or EMS runs to the health center for addressing issues related to individuals' injection drug use.

### THE FACTS

Research about syringe access exchange programs has found that these programs:

Do NOT encourage individuals to begin using drugs.

Do NOT increase drug use among existing users.

Do NOT increase crime in neighborhoods in which they operate.

Do reduce the spread of disease.

Do help people get on the path to drug treatment.