

The Right Outfit Syringe Exchange Program

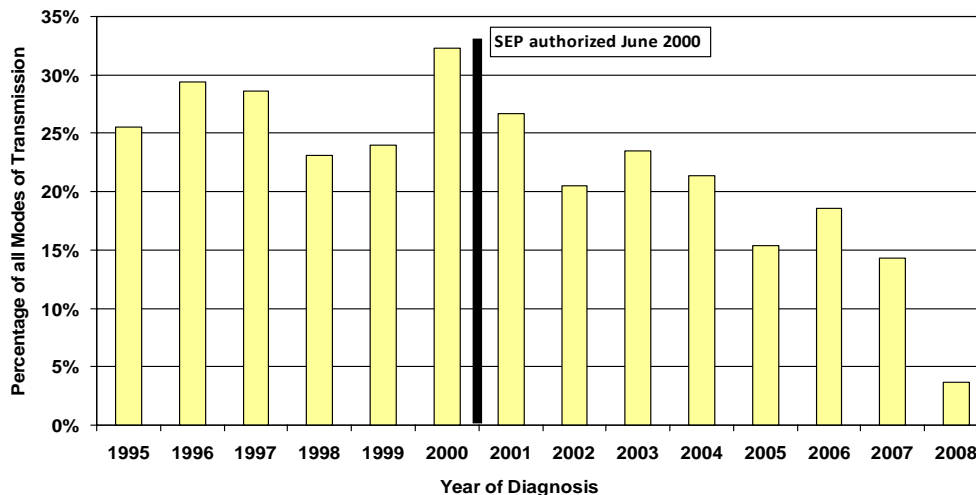
2008-09 Report

Santa Barbara County Public Health Department

Introduction

The Right Outfit Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) was authorized by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors in 2000 to reduce the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases, such as hepatitis, through needle sharing. In 1997 a report to Congress concluded that syringe or needle exchange programs can be a highly effective component of a comprehensive strategy to prevent HIV and other blood-borne infectious diseases.¹ The National Institutes of Health Consensus Panel on HIV Prevention found that Syringe Exchange Program can produce reductions in risk behavior as high as 80%, with estimates of a 30% or greater reduction of HIV among injection drug users.²

Injection Drug Use as Mode of HIV Transmission Santa Barbara County 1995-2008



Injection Drug Use and HIV Transmission

The graph above shows the percentage of AIDS and HIV cases in Santa Barbara County each year between 1995 and 2008 that reported injection drug use as a risk factor. Since the inception of the Syringe Exchange Program in June, 2000, the percentage of HIV/AIDS infections with injection drug use as a risk factor declined from 32.3% to 3.7%.

¹ Shalala, DE. *Needle Exchange Programs in America: Review of Published Studies and Ongoing Research*. Report to the Committee on Appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies. February 18, 1997

² National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Statement. Interventions to prevent HIV risk behaviors, February 11-13, 1997:7-8.

Syringe Exchange Program Data

Pacific Pride Foundation operates *The Right Outfit* syringe exchange program through two centers in Santa Barbara and Santa Maria. Program staff provides substance abuse counseling, risk reduction education, HIV testing, and referral for many services as part of the syringe exchange process. The program is supported entirely by private funds.

Program staff collects data on the number of syringes received and distributed, and various client characteristics. The following information was collected during the 2008 calendar year:

- 610 individuals made 1,347 exchanges, of which 47% were in Santa Barbara and 53% were in Santa Maria.
- 80,100 contaminated needles were collected and properly disposed of, and 65,938 clean syringes were distributed.
- 77% of the program participants were male and 23% were female, with an average age of 38 years old.
- 60% of the Syringe Exchange Program clients were White, 33% were Latino, 3% were Native American, 1% were African-American, and 1% were Asian Pacific Islander.

As indicated, HIV testing, education, counseling, and referral are key components of the Syringe Exchange Program. In 2008 the following client impacts were noted:

- 100% of clients were referred for substance abuse treatment and HIV testing.
- 6% of clients were tested for HIV during the syringe exchange visit (many more were tested before or after the visit).
- 46% were referred for other STD testing.
- 22% were referred for mental health services.
- 13% were referred for food or shelter services.

Conclusions

The Right Outfit syringe exchange program saves lives and promotes health by reducing the transmission of HIV and other blood-borne diseases. Furthermore, the program helps get contaminated needles off the street, and assists clients with accessing HIV testing, substance abuse counseling, and other needed services. The Syringe Exchange Program is a highly cost-effective method to reduce HIV infections and related treatment costs among one of the highest risk populations in the community.