



Fiscal Year 2021-2023 Syringe Exchange Program Report



Introduction

The 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 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 infectious diseases.¹ The National Institutes of Health Consensus Panel on HIV Prevention found that SEP 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 Per the California Health & Safety Code 121349.3, the Public Health Department and Pacific Pride Foundation are required every two years to provide data on the SEP.

Syringe Exchange Program Data

Pacific Pride Foundation (PPF) operates *The Right Outfit* Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) through its two fixed locations in Santa Barbara and Santa Maria, and bi-weekly outreach in Isla Vista. In addition to one-on-one exchanges of new syringes for contaminated ones, Narcan distribution (Narcan provided by the Behavioral Wellness Department, bilingual program staff at all locations provide risk management and harm reduction education, substance abuse counseling, and needed referrals in English and Spanish. The program is supported by private funds.

PPF updated its patient database in FY 2022-2023, allowing for better tracking and reporting ability, as well as increased protection of client's protected information. PPF began an exchange at a new site in Isla Vista during that time, but continued to struggle to provide HIV and HCV testing and screening, due to staff shortages and a turnover in medical directors. All clients received information on PrEP and how to make an appointment for navigation. Six clients requested and received PrEP navigation (3% of unique clients).

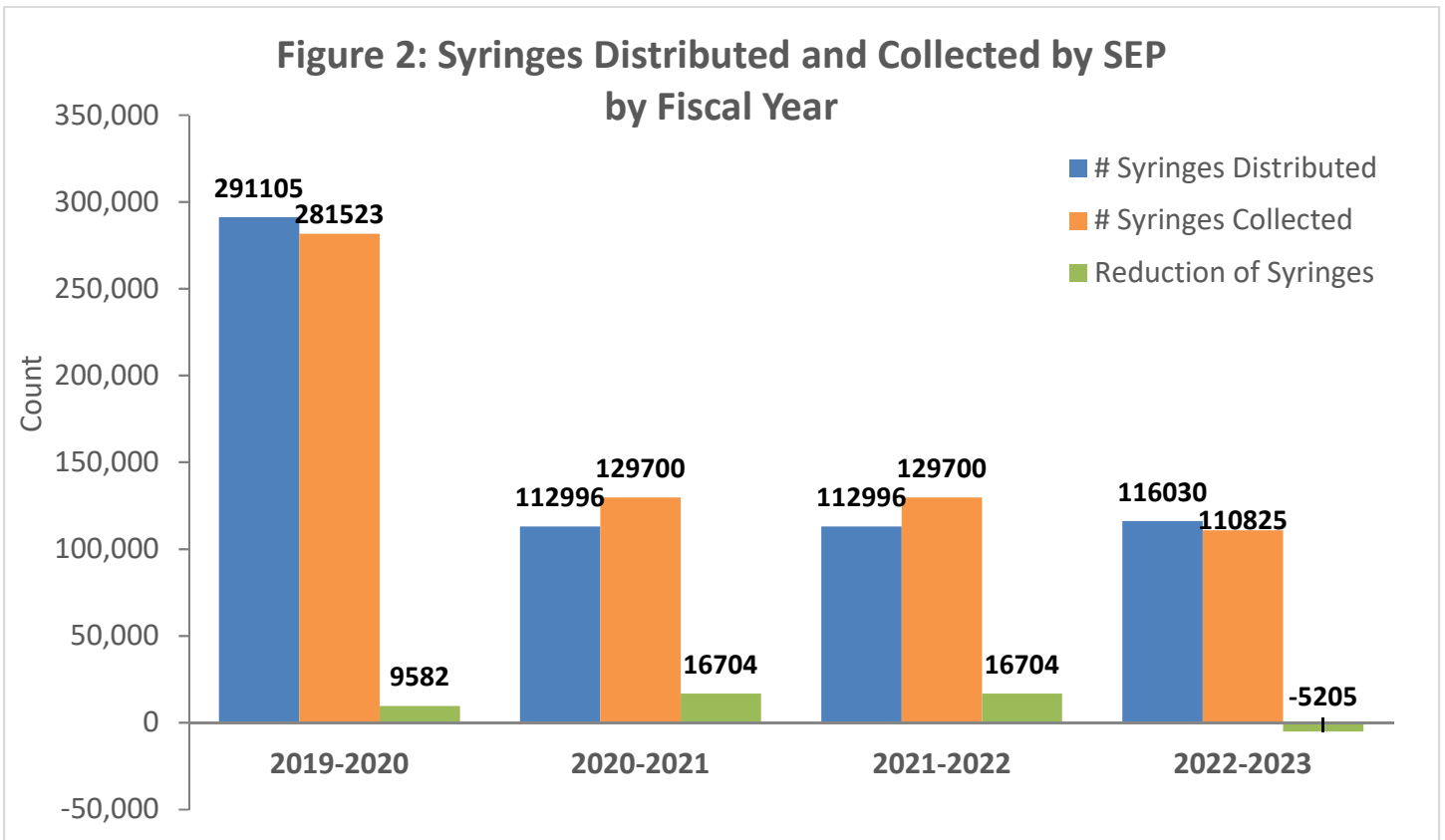
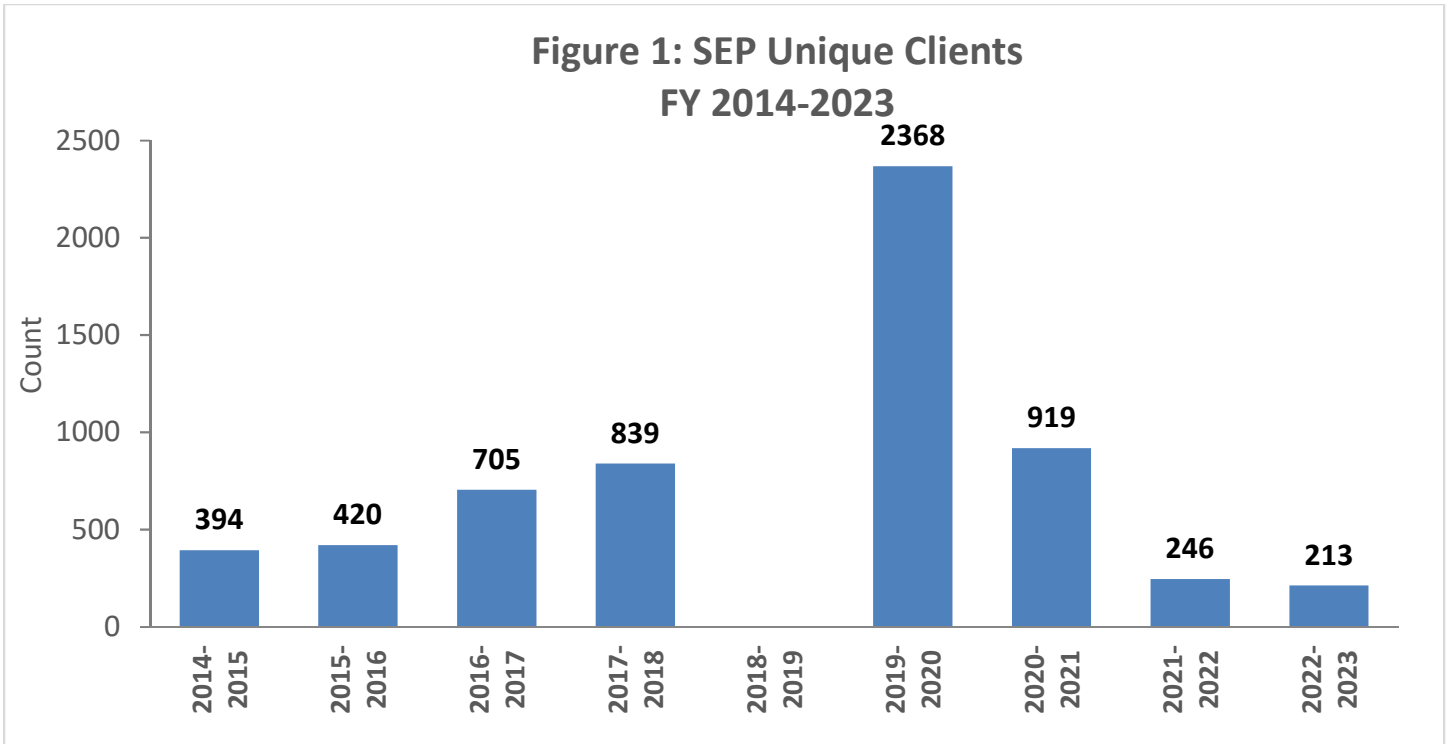
During 2021-2023 fiscal years (FY), the following program impacts were noted:

- The SEP served 459 unique clients
- All clients were *offered* the following:
 - Biohazard containers
 - Educational materials on Hep C, HIV, injection drug-use harm reduction, overdose prevention, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and PrEP

Program staff collected data on the number of syringes collected and distributed, client characteristics, and services provided during each visit. The following information was collected during 2021-2023 FY.

Number of Unique Clients and Syringe Exchange Data

- The syringe exchange program continued to see a decrease in unique clients served in FY 2021-2022 and FY 2022-2023. There were decrease of 73% between FY 2020-2021 and FY 2021-2022 (Figure 1), followed by a 13% drop in 2022-2023. SEP staff contribute the decreases given the change-over of SEP staff, the closure of the Lompoc site, and the utilization of a new SEP database and time needed for implementation.
- Additionally, the rebuilding of in-person direct services after COVID-19 and the 2023 winter storms, and the need to address staff safety/security concerns have all been challenges for the NEP and for community partners across the County. PPF is actively rebuilding SEP services and are over 80% staffed as of January 2024.



Demographics

- Across both fiscal years, men comprised the majority of the unique clients served. The proportion of male clients has been slowly increasing over the years (Figure 3).

- Race/ethnicity data was much better documented in the most recent fiscal years of available data. The most represented racial/ethnic group was White, making nearly half of unique clients self-identified, followed by Latino/Hispanic. There was a slight increase in the number of Hispanic/Latino clients (from 34% to 39%) between the two fiscal years. (Figure 4).

Figure 3a: Gender of SEP Clients, FY 2021-2022 (N=246)

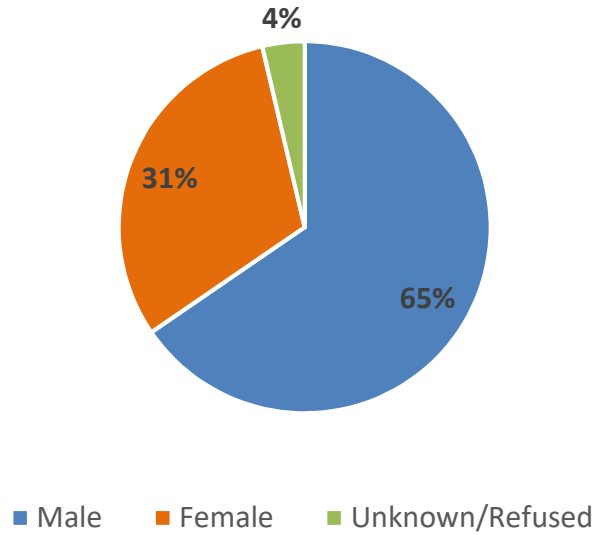


Figure 3b: Gender of SEP Clients, FY 2022-2023 (N=213)

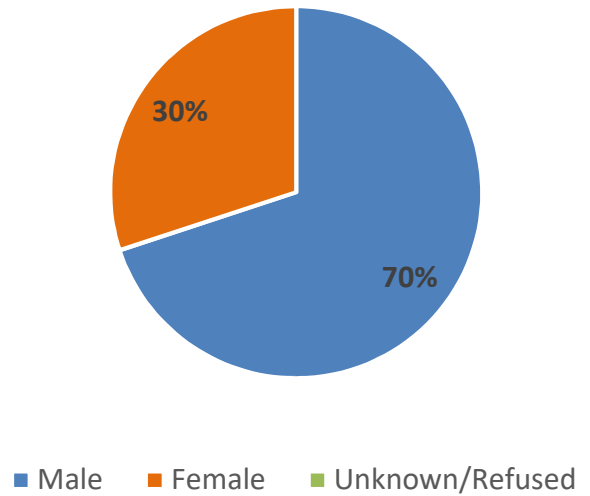


Figure 4a: Race/Ethnicity of SEP Clients FY 2021-2022 (N=246)

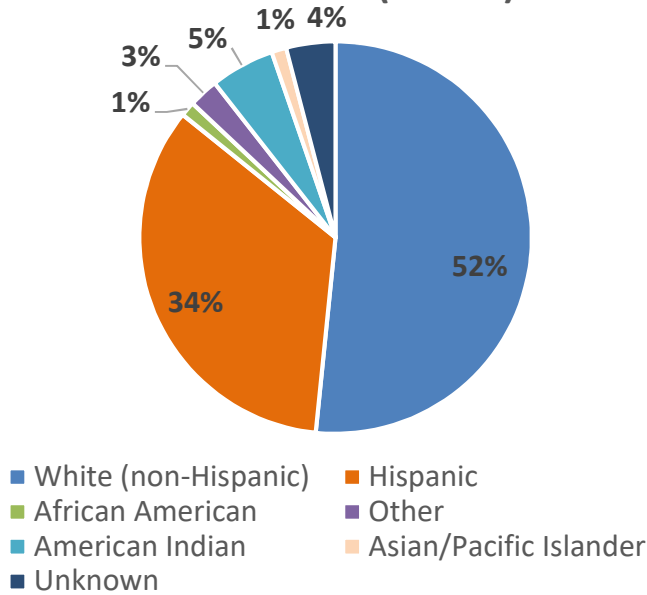
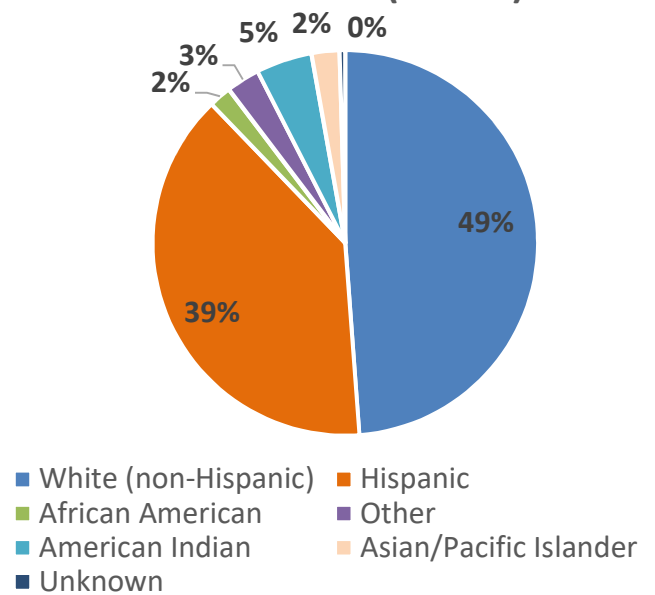
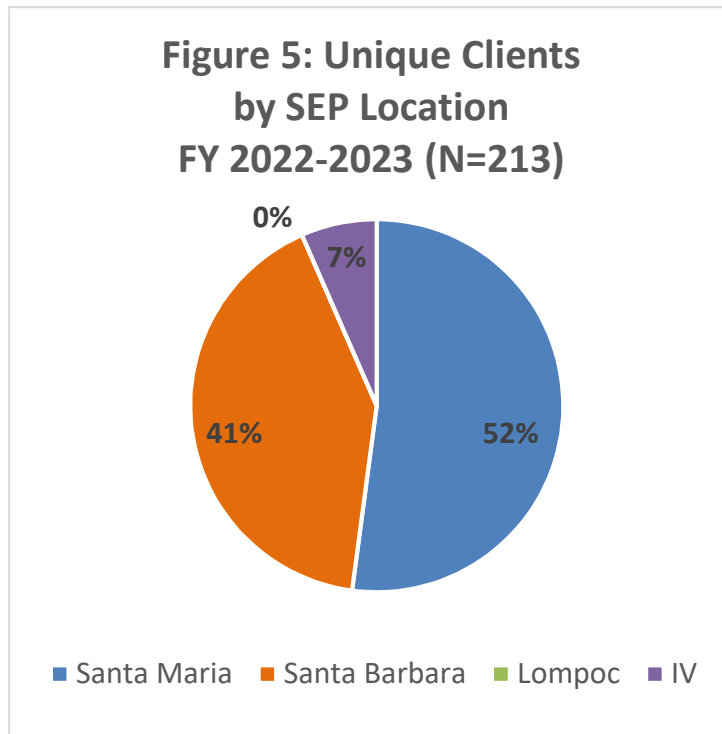


Figure 4b: Race/Ethnicity of SEP Clients FY 2022-2023 (N=213)



Service Location

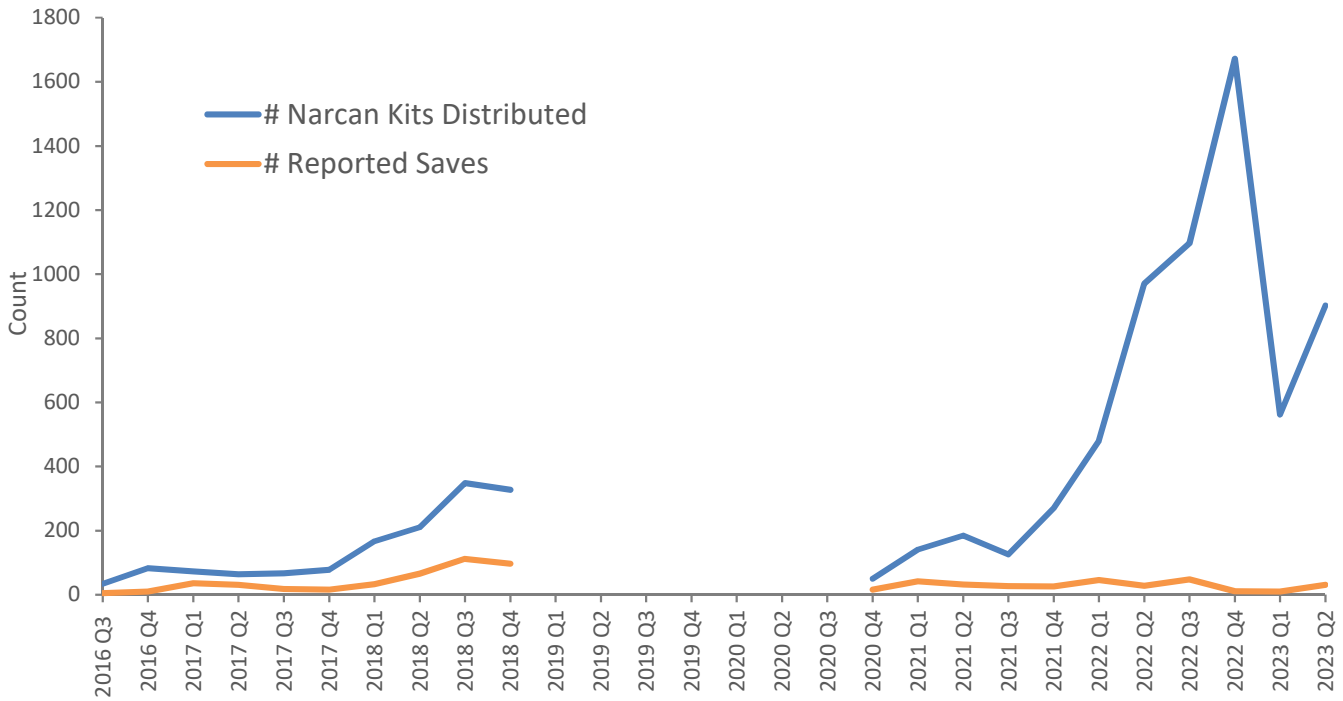
- In the most recent fiscal year where data is available, the majority of unique clients were served at the Santa Maria location (Figure 5).
- In 2022, Pacific Pride Foundation invested in the implementation of a new client management platform that will better protect data privacy and provide consistent data capture of salient data points and better measurement of the program’s impact.



Naloxone

In June 2016 an overdose prevention program was implemented at the SEP sites on behalf of the Behavioral Wellness Department. The overdose prevention program educates clients with brochures and training on overdose prevention and reversals using the intra-nasal spray Naloxone (also known by the brand name Narcan). Naloxone is a medication used in an emergency situation to block opioid receptor sites to counter the effects of an opioid overdose temporarily and until emergency medical personnel can respond. Since the program was implemented by the SEP, 6454 Naloxone Kits were distributed and 317 known overdose reversals were reported (Figure 6). On average, 5% of the Naloxone kits distributed were used in saves.

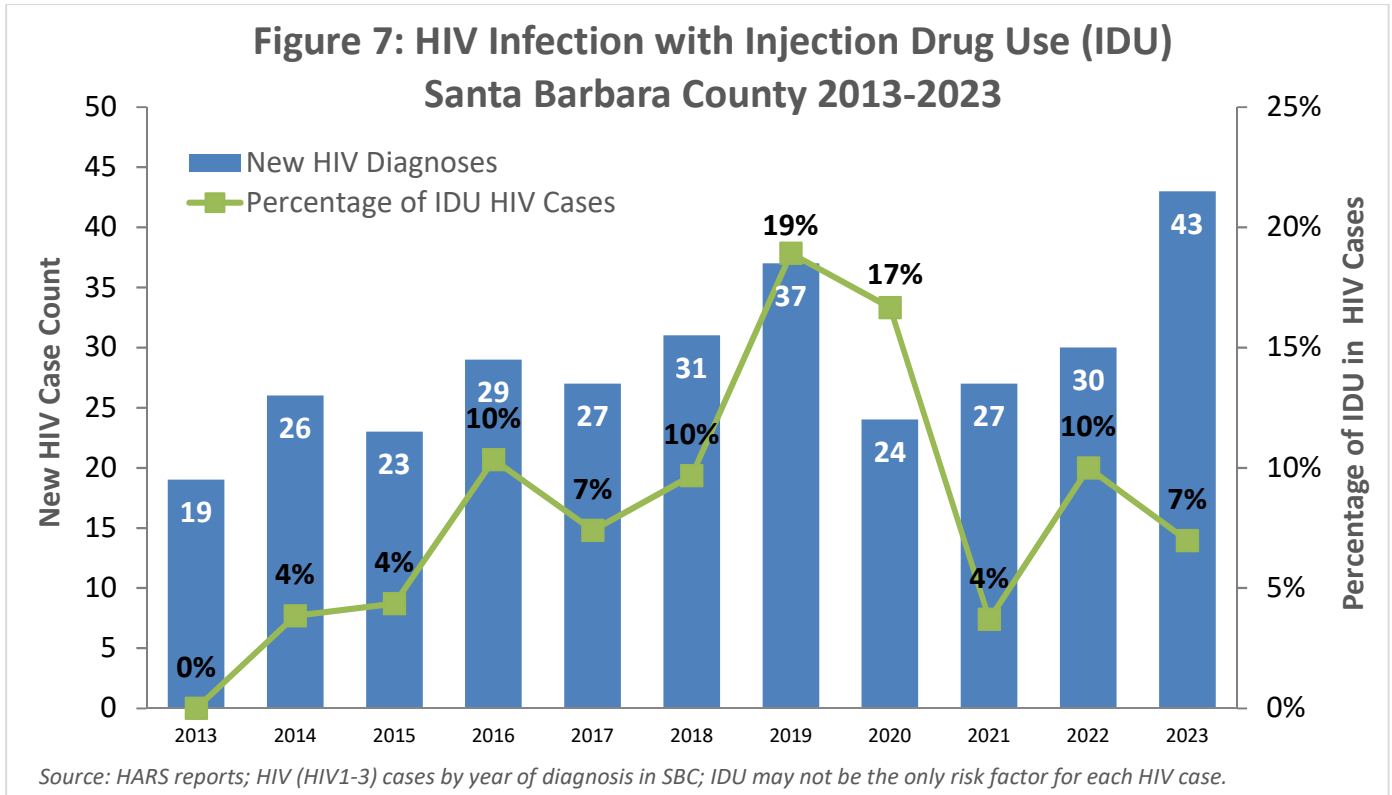
**Figure 6: SEP Naloxone Kits Distributed and Saves Reported
FY 2016-2023**



Source: Pacific Pride Foundation and Behavior Wellness

Injection Drug Use and HIV Transmission

Figure 7 depicts newly diagnosed HIV cases in Santa Barbara County residents each calendar year between 2013 and 2022 and the percentage of those cases that indicated injection drug use (IDU) as a risk factor (in green). Although the percentage of new HIV infections with IDU as a risk factor declined in 2020 and 2021, the trend did not continue in 2022. No HIV patients were diagnosed through the SEP in FY 2019-2021.



Conclusions

The Syringe Exchange Program saves lives and promotes individual and community health by reducing the transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C, and other blood-borne pathogens while being entirely supported by private funding. Additionally, the Syringe Exchange Program provides hundreds of clients, many of whom are homeless or low income, with risk management and harm reduction education, substance abuse and mental health counseling, HIV and Hepatitis C testing, and referrals for food, shelter, medical care, and other needs. The SEP is a highly cost-effective method for reducing HIV, Hepatitis C, and other blood-borne infections, and mitigates the related treatment costs among a high risk population in Santa Barbara County.

As mentioned previously, the years following the COVID-19 pandemic were rebuilding years for the needle syringe exchange program given high staff turnover or lack thereof, client apprehension regarding renewed in-person services, and reduction of certain funds. Given these challenges, Pacific Pride Foundation is striving to maintain an active SEP in the current fiscal year. PPF is working with a community partner to reestablish a safe site in the Lompoc area following the previous closure. Although no longer offering HIV and Hep C screening at the locations given the lack of certified testing staff, a strategic partnership between PPF and Planned Parenthood of the Central Coast was established to continue screening services at a trusted location not far from the SEP sites. Additionally, PPF and Behavior Wellness are in discussions regarding HIV testing kit vending machines to be posted across the county. HIV The SEP strives to maintain supplies and staffing needed to increase the output for the program, and plans to continue overdose prevention, education, and overdose reversal training/kit distribution in order to reach additional clients.

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.