

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
BOARD AGENDA LETTER**



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

**Agenda Number:**  
**Prepared on:** 3/28/02  
**Department Name:** Public Health Department  
**Department No.:** 041  
**Agenda Date:** May 7, 2002  
**Placement:** Administrative  
**Estimate Time:**  
**Continued Item:** NO  
**If Yes, date from:**

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Roger E. Heroux, MPA, Director  
**STAFF CONTACT:** Jinna Lessard, Community Health Manager  
681-5252  
**SUBJECT:** Report on the Syringe/Needle Exchange and Education Program (SEP)

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**Recommendation(s):**

That the Board of Supervisors:

Accept the Public Health Department's report on the Syringe Exchange and Education Program (SEP).

**Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:**

The recommendation is primarily aligned with:

Goal No. II. A Safe and Healthy Community in Which to Live, Work, and Visit.

Goal No. VII. A Community that Fosters the Safety and Well-Being of Families and Children.

**Executive Summary:**

History of Santa Barbara County's SEP

In 1999, the State of California enacted legislation allowing local governments to legalize syringe exchange programs within their jurisdictions. On April 27, 1999, your Board unanimously supported this legislation authorizing syringe/needle exchange projects in Santa Barbara County. Assembly Bill (AB) 136 became law in January 2000. AB 136 protects local jurisdictions and their authorized contractors from criminal prosecution for distributing syringes and hypodermic needles in SEPs authorized pursuant to "a declaration of a local emergency due to the existence of a critical local public health crisis".

A SEP refers to any County authorized program where injecting drug users (IDU) can exchange an old, used syringe and hypodermic needle for a new sterile one. Since IDUs in the United States tend to use syringes with non-removable needles, the terms "syringe" and "needle" are used interchangeably. The primary purpose of SEPs is to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, including Hepatitis B Virus (HBV), Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), among IDUs, their sexual partners, their children, and the public at large. A SEP also incorporates strategies to address both drug use and sexual risk behaviors.

On June 6, 2000, your Board approved Resolution #00-193 proclaiming the existence of a local emergency relative to transmission of HBV, HCV, and HIV among IDUs, their partners, and their children through contaminated needles. The resolution states that the local emergency shall continue in effect until its termination is proclaimed by the Board of Supervisors, and that the need for the proclamation of a local emergency be reviewed every fourteen (14) days. The resolution also authorizes the Pacific Pride Foundation, as the agent of the County, to operate a SEP.

As of March 2002, the need for the declaration of a local emergency continues due to the ongoing threat to the health and safety of the residents of Santa Barbara County from the transmission of blood-borne viral HBV, HCV, and HIV infections. Your Board has reviewed the proclamation every fourteen (14) days and have continued to approve the Local Emergency, Resolution Number 00-193. And, the Pacific Pride Foundation continues to operate a SEP as the agent of the County.

#### Burden of Epidemic in Santa Barbara County

Hepatitis B (HBV), C (HCV), and HIV infections spread through the use of shared intravenous needles and progress to potentially fatal acute and chronic diseases. These diseases can infect sexual partners of IDUs; and their children may be infected by perinatal transmission. The medical treatment for many of these individuals and families is the responsibility of the County Public Health Department. The Public Health Advisory Board (Sacramento, CA) reports that the lifetime cost of treating one HIV infected person is \$195,188. On January 28, 2002, the California Department of Health Services - Office of AIDS reported that Santa Barbara County had 126 clients receiving prescription medications for the treatment of HIV/AIDS at an annual cost of \$703, 017 (average of \$5,674.10 per client) for the 2001 calendar year.

From January 1, 1995 to December 31, 2001 there were three hundred and fifty four (354) people reported to the Public Health Department with Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and two thousand and fifty six (2,056) people reported with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) in Santa Barbara County. These numbers only represent the people that have been diagnosed and reported to the County Public Health Department Communicable Disease Control Program; therefore, only a fraction of the actual disease burden is known. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 2% of the general population is infected with HCV, which is eight thousand (8,000) individuals in our County.

The Santa Barbara County Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program (1999-2000) reported that seven hundred ninety four (794) individuals in treatment reported using a needle for drugs in the past year. Hepatitis C (HCV) infection prevalence rates in this group average around 80% according to the CDC, leaving a conservative estimate (those not in treatment aren't quantified) of six hundred thirty five (635) infected persons just within that high-risk sub-population.

Since the onset of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic in the early 1980's, six hundred eighty-one (681) confirmed cases of AIDS have been reported in the County. HIV is soon to be a reportable disease throughout California. If HIV infection prevalence follows the estimated national infection rate, we are approximating two thousand (2,000) infected individuals residing in our County.

Syringe sharing during injection drug use (IDU) is a mode of transmission for HIV/AIDS. IDU accounts for approximately 25% of reported AIDS cases in our county. Women are becoming increasingly affected by

HIV/AIDS and approximately 48% of adults living with HIV/AIDS worldwide are women. In Santa Barbara County, 11% of all reported AIDS cases are women and 24% of cases who have IDU as their exposure involved women (IDU women; women having sex with an IDU, men having sex with IDU women, pregnant mothers who are IDU, or pregnant mothers who have sex with an IDU. Since 1997, the Public Health Department HIV/AIDS Epidemiology and Surveillance Project demonstrated 18% of positive HIV results disclosed IDU or related behaviors.

#### Rationale and Evidence for SEP

Research shows that SEPs can reduce the spread of infections. In addition, studies indicate that distributing clean syringes to injection drug users does not contribute to an increase of drug-related crime, drug use initiation, or increased use of drugs among participants. The City of Santa Barbara Police Department reports that there were 141 arrests for heroine use in 2000 as compared to 135 arrests in 2001. Research shows that SEPs reduce the number of needles discarded on public sites resulting in the reduction of accidental needle sticks. The County Parks and Recreation Department reports that there has been no discarded needles in our parks or on our beaches in FY 2001. The public health benefits to those (and their partners) that do use these services have been clearly documented to decrease human suffering and reduce the economic burden in communities with established SEPs.

#### Santa Barbara County SEP

As authorized by your Board in the declaration of a local public health emergency, the Public Health Department's designated agent, Pacific Pride Foundation, operates the SEP for Santa Barbara County. The Public Health Department does not utilize any County funds to pay for the SEP. The SEP offers information on HBV, HCV, HIV/AIDS, TB and other infections, condoms; and referrals to testing, counseling, and treatment services. Syringes and needles are exchanged one-for-one; and are NOT given to minors, anyone under age 18. The SEP sites, secondarily, serve as an entrance point for those dependent on drugs to seek rehabilitative services.

An expectation for each SEP client is that he or she modifies high-risk behaviors. After a relationship has developed between the SEP and the client, a growing level of trust ensues that would encourage the drug using client to pursue a closer relationship with helping professionals. This relationship leads to one or more of the following: counseling, a 12 step program, detoxification, rehabilitation, and job training. This also leads to a healthier and more stable living environment for individuals, families, and the community.

The SEP in Santa Barbara County is involved in three research studies with RAND, Kaiser Foundation, and Beth Israel Medical Center. Besides being monitored for efficacy by these three reputable agencies, the Santa Barbara County SEP also provides the Public Health Department with operational information on a quarterly basis. An average of 540 people participate monthly returning 4460 needles for 4380 clean needles. The program has seen an increasing use of the program, which causes increasing SEP/client relationships (trust), and increasing opportunities for education, risk reduction, referral, and rehabilitation.

#### Organizations Supporting SEPs

The following organizations officially endorse establishment of syringe/needle exchange programs: The American Medical Association, American Society of Addiction Medicine, American Public Health Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Bar Association, United States Conference of Mayors, National Academy of Science, National Research Council, National Commission on

AIDS, National Institute of Health Consensus Statement, American Academy of Pediatrics, California Medical Association, California Nursing Association, and California Conference of Local Health Officers.

### Summary

Studies in the United States and Europe have shown that Syringe/Needle Exchange and Education Programs:

- ◆ reduce the spread of Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and HIV among injection drug users, their sexual partners, and needle sharing partners.
- ◆ increase access to drug rehabilitation.
- ◆ do not condone drug use and can be used as outreach to bring injection drug users into treatment.
- ◆ do not increase illegal drug use, crime, or entice non-users into using injection drugs.
- ◆ decrease the occurrence of dirty and infected needles in public places such as parks and playgrounds.
- ◆ reduce costs associated with treating HBV, HCV, and HIV infections.

In addition to the exchange of syringes/needles, the Santa Barbara County SEP provides a range of related prevention and care services that are vital to helping IDUs reduce their risks of acquiring and transmitting blood-borne diseases. These services include:

- ◆ distribution of alcohol swabs to help prevent abscesses and other bacterial infections;
- ◆ condom distribution to prevent sexual transmission of HIV;
- ◆ HIV/AIDS testing, education, counseling, and crisis intervention; and
- ◆ referrals to substance abuse treatment, and other medical and social services.

### **Mandates and Service Levels:**

This is a non-mandated program; however the California Health and Safety Code Sections 101040 and 11364.7 allow for the Board of Supervisors to take any preventive measure that may be necessary to protect and preserve the public health from any public health hazard during any local emergency, as defined by Sections 8558 and 8630 of the Government Code.

This recommendation does not result in increased service levels for the County.

### **Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

These actions will not increase the use of General Fund contribution, countywide cost allocation, or use of Public Health Department's special revenue fund. Pacific Pride Foundation operates the SEP through private donations, at no cost to the County. The Public Health Department will not operate a SEP, so will not incur any cost. However, there is the potential of future cost savings as the transmission of blood-borne diseases are reduced.

This action does not result in the need for additional facilities.

### **Special Instructions:**

Please return one copy of the Minute Order to the Department, attn: Roger Heroux.

### **Concurrence:**

Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services  
Pacific Pride Foundation