

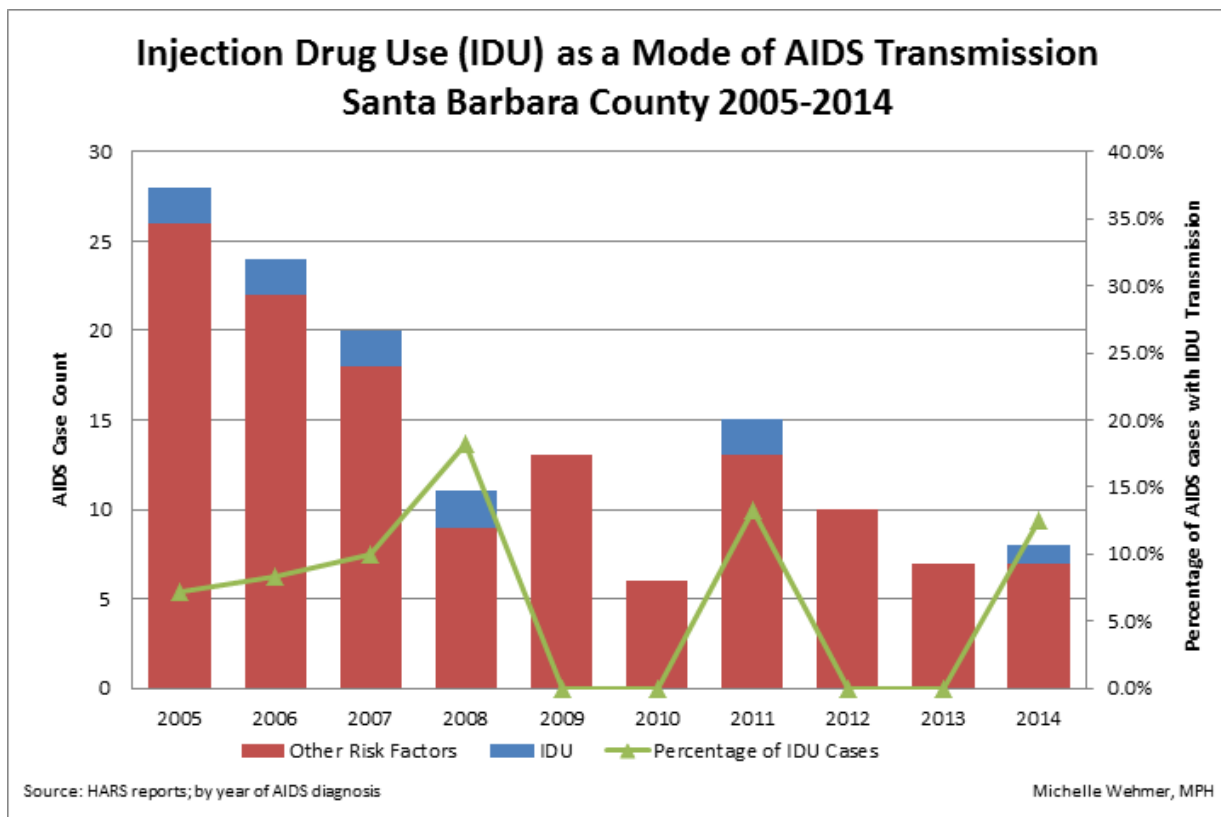
2014-15 Syringe Exchange Program Report Santa Barbara County Public Health Department

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

Injection Drug Use and HIV Transmission

The graph below shows the percentage of new AIDS cases in Santa Barbara County each year between 2005 and 2014 that indicated injection drug use (IDU) as a risk factor. The percentage of HIV/AIDS infections with IDU as a risk factor declined overall between 2005 and 2014. Further, no overall increase in injection drug use was noted during this period.



Syringe Exchange Program Data

Pacific Pride Foundation operates *The Right Outfit* Syringe Exchange Program through its two fixed locations in Santa Barbara and Santa Maria, and a recently added fixed location in Lompoc. Program staff at all three locations provide risk management and harm reduction education, substance abuse counseling, HIV and Hepatitis C testing, and needed referrals, in addition to 1-1 exchange of new syringes for contaminated ones. Additionally, there are bilingual English and Spanish staff members at all three locations. The program is supported entirely by private funds.

Program staff collects data on the number of syringes collected and distributed, client characteristics, and services provided during each visit. The following information was collected during 2014-15:

- 394 unique clients, 261 in South County and 133 in North County, participated in the program.
- 67% of clients were male, 32% female, and <1% FTM with an average age of 44 in the north county and 36 in the south county.

- 52% of clients identified as Caucasian, 36% as Hispanic/Latino, 5% as American Indian, 2% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% as African American, and 3% as Other
- 1,286 exchanges were completed, 823 in South County and 463 in North County
- 54,654 sterile syringes were distributed and 68,976 contaminated syringes were collected and properly disposed of, reducing the number of used syringes on the street by 14,322.

The following program impacts were noted:

- 91% of clients were offered HIV and Hepatitis C testing
- 100% were provided with IDU-specific harm reduction educational materials, HIV, Hepatitis C, and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) educational materials, and biohazard containers
- 62% were referred to substance abuse counseling services
- 19% of our unique clients were referred directly to mental health services
- 42% of our unique clients were referred for additional STI testing
- 8% of our unique clients were tested for HIV during an exchange visit, while 6% more returned for a test outside of SEP program hours
- 5% of our unique clients were referred to local food programs
- 15% of our unique clients were referred to local shelter programs

The following client stories illustrate the impact of the SEP on a personal level:

A Hispanic woman in her 40s utilizes the North County syringe exchange weekly. She's a Santa Maria native and longtime heroin user. She is a model exchange client who values and appreciates our program. She tests for HIV every 6 months and donates \$5, sometimes \$10, every time she comes to exchange. It means so much to her that we know how valuable our services are to her. The client has, at one point in her life, been told she has Hepatitis C (HCV). Through testing and gaining basic education through our test counselors she knows how to prevent the spread of HCV and now educates others on the importance of not sharing needles or works.

A Hispanic man in his 40s recently started utilizing our North County exchange after years of being clean and sober. A traumatic event triggered his heroin addiction and he started using again. In a moment of despair, the client shared needles with other injection drug users and sought PPF out to get tested. Through counseling the client was given the education needed to hopefully prevent future needle and work sharing. He was also referred back to the syringe exchange program as well as Good Samaritan Detox. A few weeks had gone by of consistent client usage of the exchange. The client started cutting back on needle amount to attempt to wean himself off of the drug. The client disclosed to his test counselor that he was worried he was going to lose custody of his child if he didn't stop using soon. He was referred once again to Detox and this time said he was willing to try. It's been a month since this client has returned back to the exchange and we can only hope that he has successfully completed the detox program.

A white man in his late 20s comes regularly to our new fixed-site Lompoc exchange, and is very vocal about how relieved he is to have a place to get clean syringes and works. He started using in his teens, when he would share needles with his father, who was living with Hepatitis C. Our client is not ready to stop using, but he is profoundly ready to take steps toward protecting himself and others, including getting tested for HIV and Hepatitis C, not sharing equipment, and educating his friends and family on harm reduction strategies. The last time he came into the exchange, he asked if he could help PPF by taking flyers around his neighborhood, and he was excitedly brainstorming different areas in Lompoc that could be good for flyering (distributing flyers) and talking with community members about the exchange and drop-in testing services.

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. 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. Being entirely supported with private funding, the program is a highly cost-effective method for reducing HIV,

Hepatitis C, and other blood-borne infections, and the related treatment costs, among one of the highest risk populations in Santa Barbara County.

In 2016, Pacific Pride Foundation is looking forward to expanding the Syringe Exchange Program through our new mobile Health Utility Vehicle. Pacific Pride is working on ways of implementing this additional service that ensure safety for staff and community, and are currently shadowing other organizations that have staffed mobile exchange units for decades in similar contexts. They are also consulting with experienced clinicians and other agencies' staff who can advise us as we grow our program to include mobile syringe exchange.

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.