

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 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 operates *The Right Outfit* Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) through its two fixed locations in Santa Barbara and Santa Maria and a recently added a mobile 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 at all three locations. The program is supported entirely by private funds.

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

A white woman in her late 20's had been consistently using PPF's SEP not only for herself but for her camp. Through the SEP, she and her camp had access to harm reduction supplies as well as Naloxone (a lifesaving opiate overdose reversal drug). She consistently reported various successful overdose reversals and constantly expressed her gratitude for our services and all it had done to help her camp reduce their risk of HIV, HCV, and overdoses.

A Latino man in his early 20's came to PPF's SEP and disposed his needles without asking for any in return. He announced he had made the decision to stop using heroin and will no longer be returning to our SEP, but that he appreciated this service existing when he needed to utilize it.

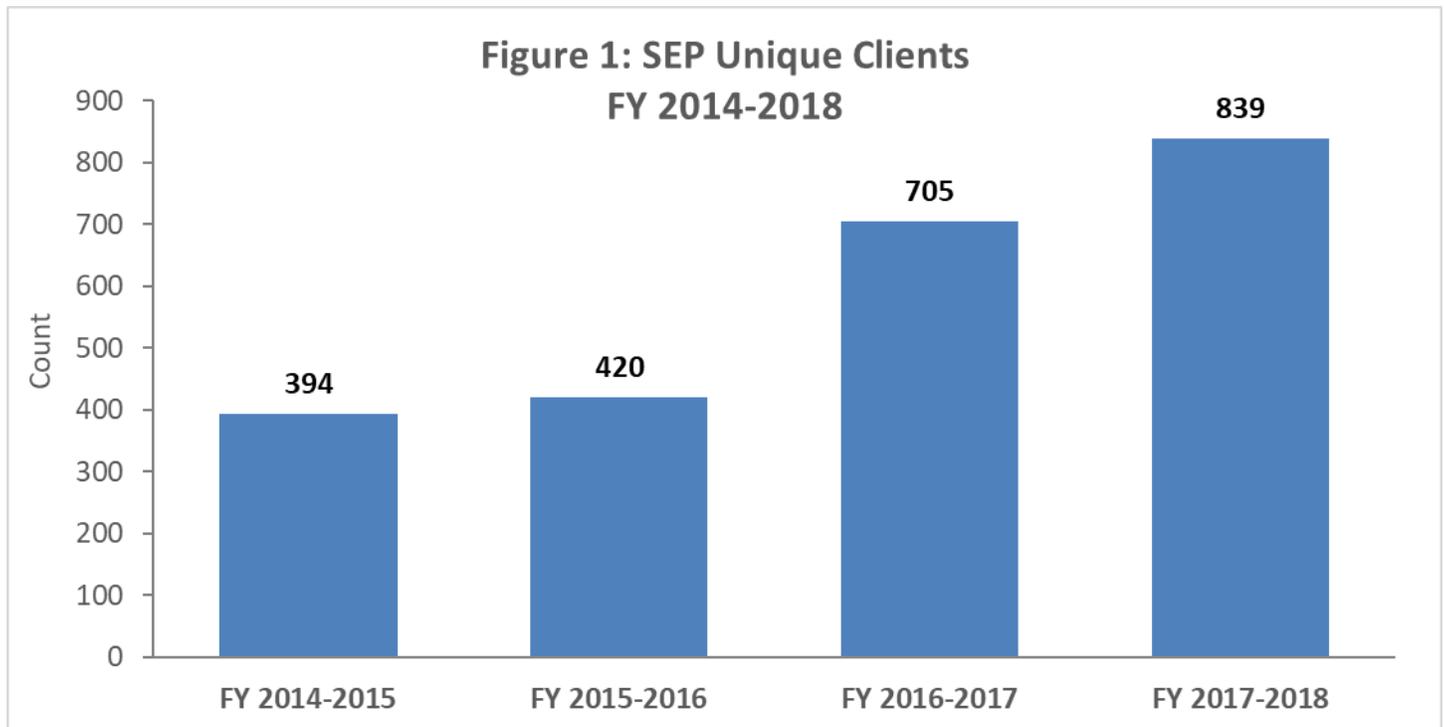
During 2017-18 fiscal year (FY), the following program impacts were noted-

- The SEP served 839 unique clients
- All clients were *offered* the following:
 - HIV and/or Hep C testing
 - Additional STI testing
 - Biohazard containers
 - Educational materials on Hep C, HIV, injection drug-use harm reduction, overdose prevention, and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Screening results:
 - Of 85 clients who were screened for Hep C, 15 (17.6%) tested positive
 - No clients tested positive for HIV
- Referral to services:
 - Substance abuse counseling: 58% were referred
 - Mental health services: 21% were referred

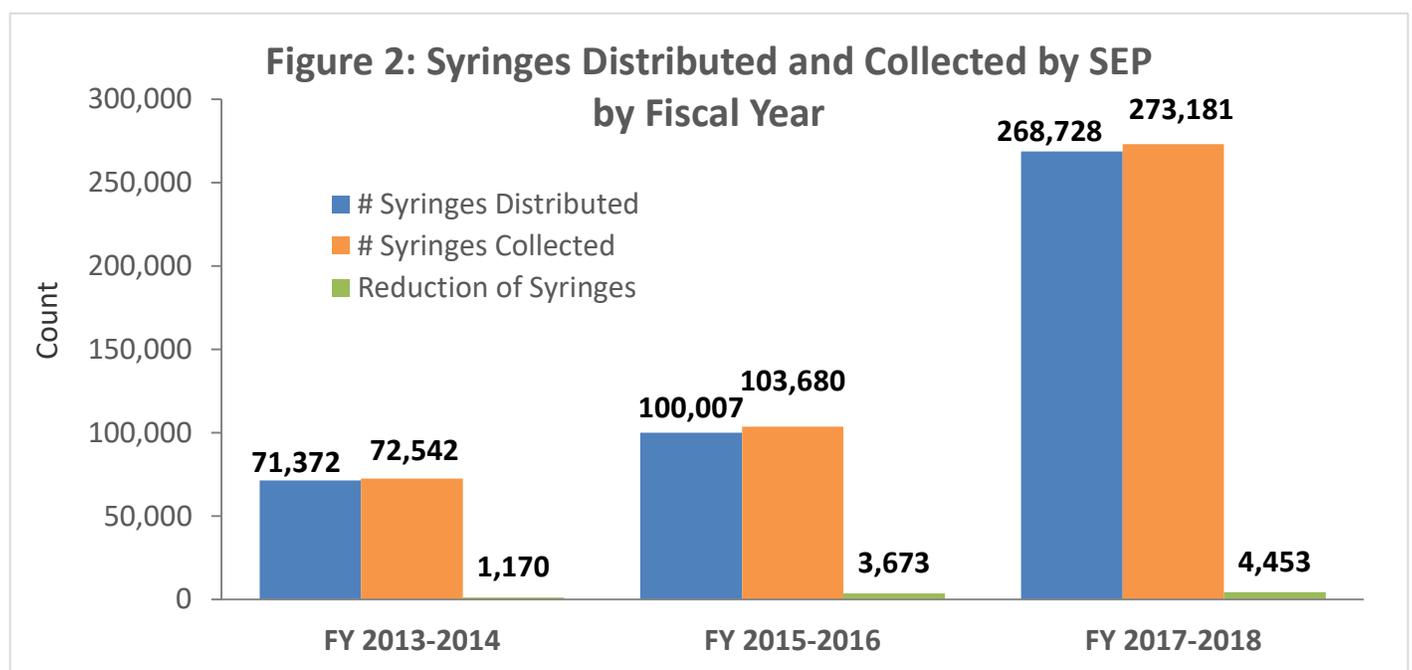
Program staff collected data on the number of syringes collected and distributed, client characteristics, and services provided during each visit. The following information was collected during 2017-18 FY.

Number of Unique Clients and Syringe Exchange Data

- In FY 2017-18, there was a 19% increase in unique clients utilizing the SEP compared to FY 2016-17 (Figure 1). SEP staff contribute the client increase to the implementation of the Naloxone program and the consistent service provided at the three sites. Anecdotally, when other SEPs were surveyed, 80% reported an increase of new clients, some as high as 25%.



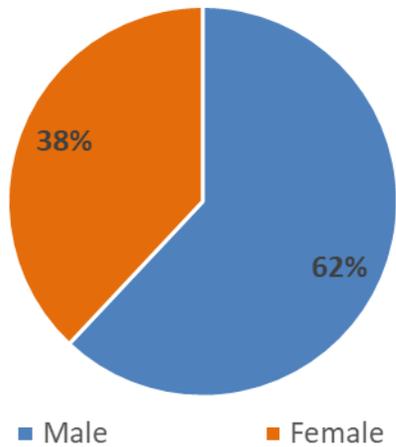
- Compared to previous reports, in FY 2017-2018, 2.5 times more syringes were distributed (268,728 sterile syringes) than in FY 2015-2016. Also in that time period, 2.7 times more contaminated syringes were collected and properly disposed (273,181 contaminated syringes), reducing the number of used syringes on the street by 4,453 (Figure 2).



Demographics

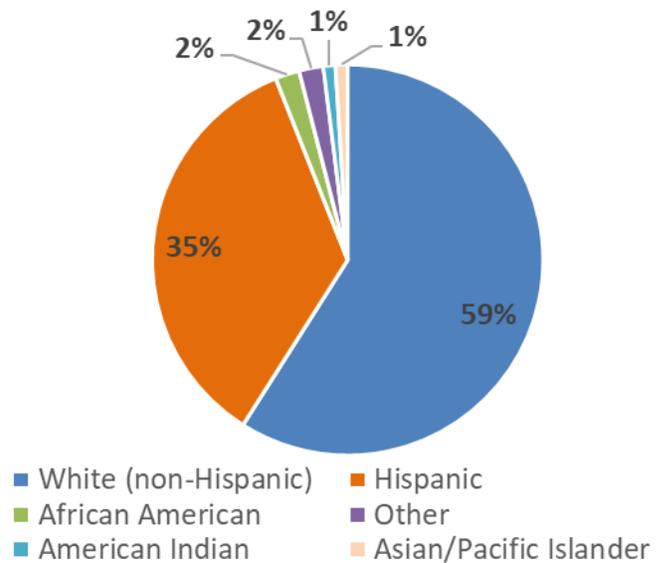
- Of the 839 unique clients who participated in the SEP, 62% were male and 38% were female. Less than 1% identified as Female-to-Male (Figure 3).
- The majority of clients were non-Hispanic white (59%) followed by Hispanic/Latino (35%) (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Gender of SEP Clients
FY 2017-2018 (N=839)**



* Less than 1% of clients identified as FTM

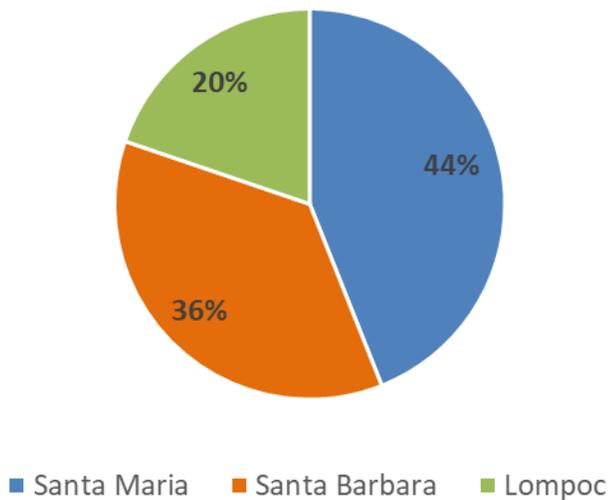
**Figure 4: Race/Ethnicity
of SEP Clients
FY 2017-2018 (N=839)**



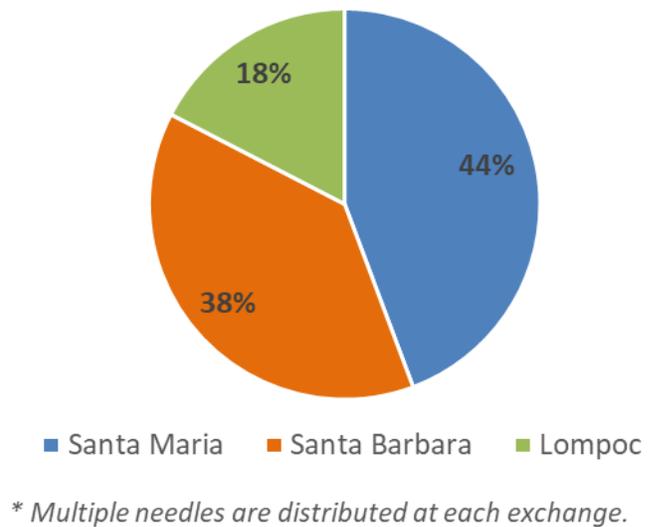
Service Location

- Across the three SEP sites, 369 clients participated in Santa Maria, 304 participated in Santa Barbara and 166 participated in Lompoc (Figure 5).
- Although the Lompoc site had the fewest number of unique clients in the county, the Lompoc SEP had 38% of the client visits in the county (Figure 6), in other words, the Lompoc SEP had the highest utilization rate per the number of clients served.

**Figure 5: Unique Clients
by SEP Location
FY 2017-2018 (N=839)**

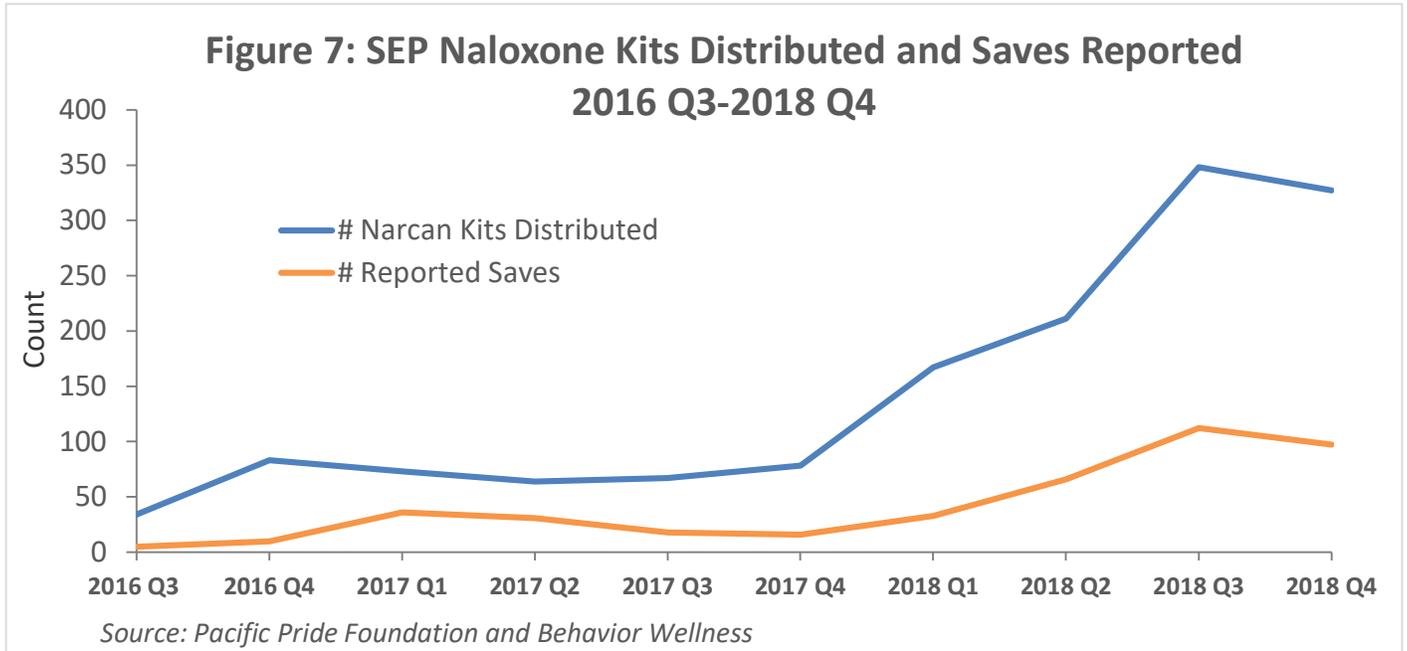


**Figure 6: Number of Exchanges
by SEP Location
FY 2017-2018 (N=2,659)**



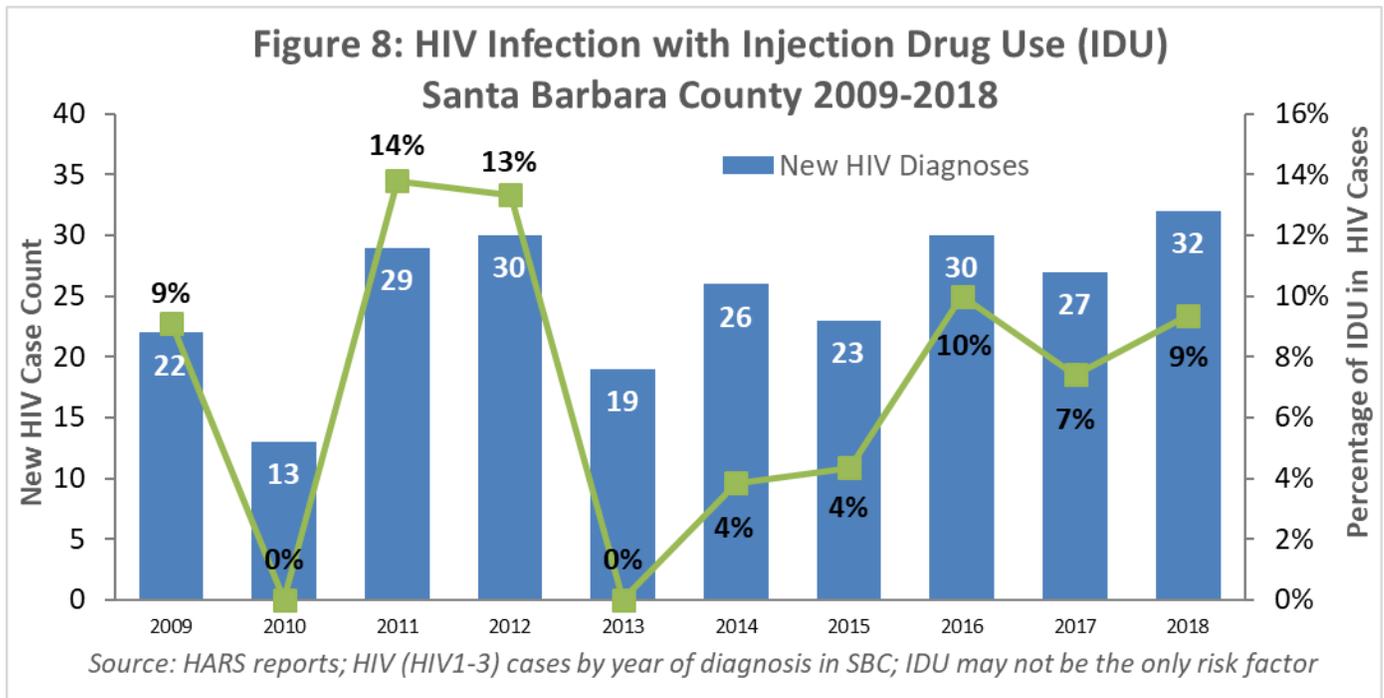
Naloxone

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, 1452 Naloxone Kits were distributed and 424 known overdose reversals were reported (Figure 7).



Injection Drug Use and HIV Transmission

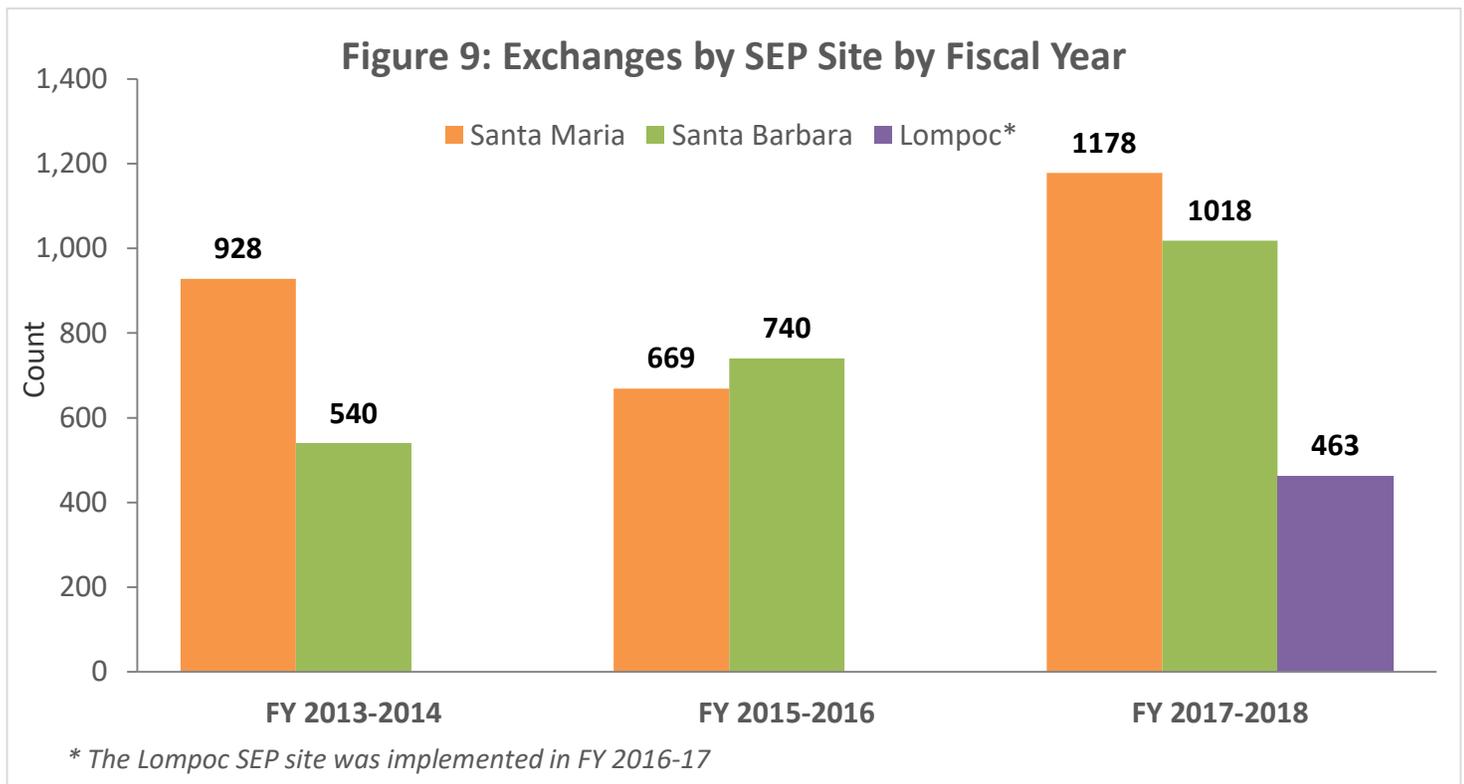
Figure 8 depicts the percentage of newly diagnosed HIV cases in Santa Barbara County residents each year between 2009 and 2018 that indicated injection drug use (IDU) as a risk factor. The percentage of new HIV infections with IDU as a risk factor declined in 2017, but increased in 2018. No HIV patients were diagnosed through the SEP in FY 2017-2018.



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 one of the highest risk populations in Santa Barbara County.

In 2019-2020, Pacific Pride Foundation is striving to maintain a very active SEP. The three targeted weekly sites in Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, and Lompoc, have nearly doubled in attendance since the last SEP report for FY 2015-2016 due to Hep C and HIV screening programs, grassroots outreach, and targeted marketing (Figure 9). The SEP strives to maintain supplies and staffing needed for this new level of output for the program, and plans to continue overdose prevention, education, and overdose reversal training/kit distribution in order to reach an additional 100 people. In the next two years, one-on-one education, risk reduction, and risk assessment sessions will be conducted to 800+ people (approximately 35 percent from Santa Maria/Lompoc and 65 percent South County) at high-risk for HCV or HIV (or transmitting the virus to others) through the SEP.



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.