



# Risk Management Considerations for Needle Exchange Programs

## What is it?

Needle Exchange Programs (NEPs) help to reduce the risk of HIV and Hepatitis transmissions by increasing access to sterile needles and syringes, removing used needles from circulation and educating clients about the risk of re-using injection equipment.

Needle Exchange Programs are important because:

1. NEPs reduce transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV) and other blood-borne pathogens among IDUs
2. NEPs reduce unsafe drug use and sexual behaviours associated with the transmission of HIV, HBV, HCV and other blood-borne pathogens
3. NEPs reduce the number of used needles discarded in the community
4. NEPs do not encourage initiation of injection drug use, do not increase the duration or the frequency of injection drug use or decrease the motivation to reduce drug use
5. The lifetime costs of providing treatment for IDUs living with HIV greatly exceeds the costs of providing NEP services
6. At any given time, most individuals who inject drugs are not receiving drug treatment and NEPS are often the only contact these people have with health or social service providers

## What are the risks involved in offering a Needle Exchange Program?

- Needle stick injuries, client overdoses or other acute health problems on-site
- Responses to police requests for information
- Tampering with disposal boxes
- Violent clients
- Break ins
- On call or afterhours staff
- Onsite drug deal
- There may be a crowd
- Equipment could break and not be properly sterilized
- Inappropriately discarded injection equipment
- The drugs could be used outside the facility on facility grounds

## How do you mitigate the risks?

- Staffing –hire staff with the necessary qualifications
- Behaviour expectations of staff and clients (e.g., no discrimination, no violence, no dealing or using on-site or in the vehicles) and consequences for violating behavioural expectations
- Training on how to respond to police requests
- Provide expectations and limits for any volunteers
- Provide disposal boxes that can't be tampered with

- Have procedures in place and training for staff on how to handle violent or dangerous clients
- Have appropriate security set up
- Proper training for on call of afterhours staff
- Have signs that display the rules of the center
- Have a plan in place for drug deals at the facility
- Needle stick injury protocols posted by the needle exchange counter
- Have safety protocols readily available
- Ensure workers are clearly identified (have uniforms)
- Develop a script for the exchange to ensure staff and volunteers are consistent in their messages to clients and the community
- Make sure all equipment is working properly, if something breaks be sure to get it fixed immediately
- Consistent training and clinical practice guidelines
- A minimum of three needle exchange staff members aside from nurses should be on duty at all times
- Give clients adequate disposal options. Such as public disposal boxes
- Establish site behaviour expectations with clients, or a needle exchange code of conduct. Enforce this code of conduct by addressing every infraction.
- Monitor the outside area every 15 minutes, and enforce a policy of not using drugs outside the site
- Needle exchange programs across an area should all be regularly monitored to ensure consistency of operations.

While Intact Public Entities Inc. does its best to provide useful general information and guidance on matters of interest to its clients, statutes, regulations and the common law continually change and evolve, vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and are subject to differing interpretations and opinions. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. is not intended to replace legal or other professional advice or services. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. herein is provided "as is" and without any warranty, either express or implied, as to its fitness, quality, accuracy, applicability or timeliness. Before taking any action, consult an appropriate professional and satisfy yourself about the fitness, accuracy, applicability or timeliness of any information or opinions contained herein. Intact Public Entities Inc. assumes no liability whatsoever for any errors or omissions associated with the information provided herein and furthermore assumes no liability for any decision or action taken in reliance on the information contained in these materials or for any damages, losses, costs or expenses in a way connected to it. Intact Public Entities Inc. is operated by a wholly owned subsidiary of Intact Financial Corporation. Intact Design® and Risk Management Centre of Excellence® are registered trademarks of Intact Financial Corporation or its affiliates. All other trademarks are properties of their respective owners. TM & © 2021 Intact Public Entities Inc. and/or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.