

All NSP must provide safe disposal containers with any needles and syringes distributed.

A NSP should offer a confidential and non-judgemental service intended to maximise opportunities for contact, health education, and encourage people who inject drugs to practice safer injecting. It is not the function of a NSP to control, or regulate, people's drug use.

### Are Needle and Syringe Programs legal?

The Western Australian *Poisons Amendment Act* (1994) allows approved organisations to provide sterile injecting equipment to people who inject drugs.

All organisations that operate a NSP have to be approved under the Act, and meet specific requirements as stated in the *Poisons Amendment Regulations* (1994).

Applications for a license should be made to the Sexual Health Program, Communicable Disease Control Branch, Department of Health. All approvals are issued with the authority of the Commissioner of Health.

### What about the health risks caused by discarded used needles and syringes?

NSP encourage the safe disposal of used needles and syringes. Along with disposal containers, people accessing the service are provided with information and education on safe disposal.

The majority of people who inject drugs do the right thing, returning their used needles and syringes to an exchange, or disposing of them in a recommended container in their domestic waste. As with other forms of littering, a few people dispose of used injecting equipment irresponsibly.

Improperly discarded needles and syringes generate a lot of fear in the community over the health risk from needlestick injuries - a *needlestick injury* is when a needle accidentally pierces the skin.

The risk of contracting hepatitis C, hepatitis B or HIV via a needlestick injury occurring **in the community** (such as the beach or a playground) is very low compared to the risks of contracting these infections from a needlestick injury **in a health setting**. None the less, it is advisable to see a doctor within 24 hours to discuss the need for testing and vaccination.

To date, there has been no documented case, in a community setting, of hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV being transmitted via a needlestick injury.

### INFORMATION on NSP

Contact:

#### The Sexual Health Program

Communicable Disease Control Branch  
Department of Health, Western Australia

Phone: 08 9388 4841

(including information on setting up a NSP in your community)

### INFORMATION is also available from:

#### Western Australian Substance Users Association (WASUA)

Phone: 9227 7866

#### Western Australian AIDS Council (WAAC)

Phone: 08 9482 0000

#### The Hepatitis C Council of WA

Phone: 08 9328 8538 or

Country Callers: 1800 800 070

#### ADIS

#### Alcohol and Drug Information Service

(24 hours)

Phone: 08 9442 5000 or

Country Callers: 1800 198 024

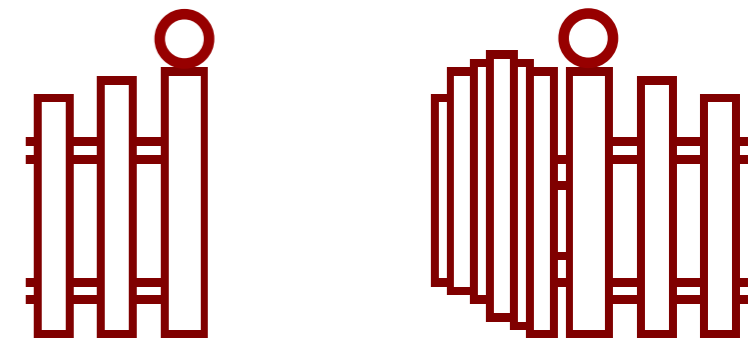


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# Understanding the HOW & WHY of Needle & Syringe Programs in Western Australia



## Why do we need a Needle & Syringe Program in our community?

While many people use legal drugs such as alcohol or tobacco in our community, there are a small number of people who use illegal drugs or who misuse prescription drugs. This happens despite policing efforts and education programs.

A few of these people inject the drugs they use. People who inject drugs are at a greater risk of contracting viral infections such as HIV (the virus that causes AIDS), hepatitis B or hepatitis C. These infections are caused by viruses that are transmitted by blood-to-blood contact. A high proportion of people who inject drugs contract hepatitis C. HIV and hepatitis B can also be transmitted by sexual contact.

People risk becoming infected when they share injecting equipment. Once a person is infected, they may spread the infection to the broader community via an injury or other blood-to-blood contact, or sexual contact.

The risk of transmission is higher if people cannot access new, sterile injecting equipment, which is why needle and syringe programs are essential.

Needle and syringe programs provide sterile injecting equipment to people who inject drugs. This helps to limit or reduce the transmission of blood borne viruses. Needle and syringe programs are a vital public health action that helps protect the health of **EVERYONE** in the community.

- People who inject drugs will do so whether or not sterile needles and syringes are available to them.
- Needle and syringe programs aim to reduce the harm caused by injecting drug use.
- Needle and syringe programs operate in conjunction with treatment and education programs aimed at reducing drug use, and strategies aimed at reducing the amount of drugs available.

**NSP DO NOT ENCOURAGE DRUG USE**

**NSP LOWER THE RISK OF BLOOD BORNE VIRUS TRANSMISSION**

**NSP SAVE THE COMMUNITY MORE MONEY THAN THEY COST**

**Needle and syringe programs do not condone or support the use of illegal drugs.**

### Community benefits of Needle and Syringe Programs(NSP)

**NSP** reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis B among people who inject drugs and the broader community, and contribute to the containment of hepatitis C.

**NSP** recognise that the lack of access to sterile injecting equipment does not stop people injecting

**NSP** save costs. HIV can cause AIDS, while the hepatitis C virus can result in chronic liver inflammation and other serious illness. Treating these diseases costs far more to the individual, and the community, than programs aimed at preventing the spread of blood borne viruses.

**NSP** are often the first and /or only contact people who inject drugs have with the health care system.

**NSP** can also provide people who inject with information on safer injecting, and create opportunities for education and referral to treatment services.

**NSP** encourage the safe disposal of injecting equipment by providing information and education on how and where to safely dispose of used needles and syringes.

**NSP** represent a compassionate approach to the prevention of diseases that directly or indirectly affect the whole community.

### How is the service provided?

The term *Needle and Syringe Program* (NSP) describes any program where sterile injecting equipment is made available to people who inject drugs. Both government and non-government agencies run NSP. There are three main types of services: pharmacy-based NSP; health-service based NSP (hospitals, community health centres and other related health services); and needle and syringe exchange programs (NSEP).

Approximately two thirds of the injecting equipment distributed in Western Australia (WA) is sold by pharmacies. NESP mostly distribute the remainder, with a small percentage provided by health-service based NSP. Regional hospitals mainly provide after-hours access to sterile needles and syringes once the local pharmacy is closed or if there is no local pharmacy-based program.

Health-service based NSP distribute sterile needles and syringes in the form of Fitpacks®. A Fitpack® is a black, hard plastic box containing 5 needles and syringes. The box is also a disposal container for used equipment, and should be disposed of as domestic waste (in the rubbish bin). The box is labelled to provide information on a range of relevant issues such as blood borne viruses, safe disposal, or overdose.

Pharmacies or health services in WA generally do not accept used needles and syringes. This differs from NESP where needles and syringes are provided free of charge in exchange for used ones. In WA, clients are charged for new needles and syringes if they do not return used ones. NESP mainly operate in the metropolitan area, with one also operating in the Bunbury area.