

Massachusetts Campaign for Responsible Syringe Policy

Join the 2003-2004 campaign to increase access to sterile syringes

41% of all people living with HIV/AIDS in Massachusetts were exposed to HIV infection either through their own injection drug use or the injection drug use of their sex partner. Massachusetts has the ninth highest HIV infection rate related to injection drug use in the nation. Injection drug use is also the single most significant factor for contracting hepatitis C, which is the leading indicator for liver transplantation. **There is consensus in the medical and scientific communities that increasing access to sterile syringes through pharmacy sales and broad availability of needle exchange is a proven and critical tool in reducing HIV and hepatitis C transmission rates.**

Pharmacy Access

Massachusetts is one of only FOUR states in the country that require a prescription to obtain sterile syringes from a pharmacy. Seven major government funded studies concur that access to sterile syringes does not increase drug use. Evidence from other states that recently repealed their prescription requirement to permit over the counter syringe sales reveals no reported increase in drug use or crime but a significant reduction in needle sharing. Sterile syringes in Massachusetts are scarce due to over-regulation and this contributes to our state's high rate of injection drug related HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C infection.

A number of bills have been filed in the 2003-2004 session to bring Massachusetts in line with the rest of the country by removing barriers to accessing sterile syringes through pharmacies. Some of these bills seek to protect those pharmacists who are willing to sell syringes and ensure that buyers of syringes will be provided educational information regarding safe disposal, drug treatment and HIV/AIDS treatment. These bills also are committed to maintaining insurance coverage for all people for whom syringes are medically necessary. These bills are scheduled to be heard on January 28th, 2004.

Needle Exchange

Current Massachusetts law authorizes up to 10 pilot needle exchange programs in the state but only four communities (Boston, Cambridge, Northampton and Provincetown) have active programs. The disparity between high HIV and hepatitis C infection rates due to use of unclean needles and the implementation of merely four programs statewide is due to the requirement for local approval before DPH can site a program. Many legislators who pushed for local approval language will concede now that this was put in place for political reasons having nothing to do with standards and duties to protect "the public health."

Two bills have been introduced in this session to expand the number of needle exchange programs in the state. Both bills call for local community input before DPH makes its final decision on siting a new program. DPH would be given the authority to site the programs where they would best protect the public from HIV and hepatitis C by reducing the number of transmissions. These bills are also scheduled to be heard on January 28th, 2004.

**Please join the fight to increase access to sterile syringes in
Massachusetts!!**

See the back of this page for ways you can help today.

Massachusetts Campaign for Responsible Syringe Policy

The goal of the Massachusetts Campaign for Responsible Syringe Policy is to decrease the number of new HIV and hepatitis C infections due to the sharing of used syringes by increasing access to sterile syringes. This goal can be accomplished through allowing the purchase of syringes through pharmacies without a prescription, by decriminalizing the possession of syringes, by increasing the number of needle exchange programs in the state, or any combination of the three.

You and/or your organization can help in a number of ways:

Agree to list your organization's name on Campaign's materials.

Yes, add my organization to the growing list of public supporters of the Massachusetts Campaign for Responsible Syringe Policy.

Organization name as it should appear _____

Signature _____

Name and Title _____

Join the Campaign contact list

Yes, add me to your contact list so that I will receive notices of campaign meetings and Action Alerts.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Yes, I am interested in joining the Campaign, but would like more information first. Please call me. Name and phone number _____

Or, you may call Mary Ann Walsh at 617.523.7808 x121 or Alison Kirchgasser at 617.450.1203.

Thanks for your interest and support. This is a winnable effort! Please return this form to:

Alison Kirchgasser
AIDS Action Committee
294 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02108
617-450-1203, 617-262-6185 (fax)
akirchgasser@aac.org OR policy@aac.org

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