

The BCCDC and Provincial Health Officer recommend against used needle buy-back programs

We're aware used needle buy-back programs are being introduced into some communities. The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and Provincial Health Officer do not recommend the use of these programs because there is no evidence that they are effective and they may cause unintended harm and consequences for the following reasons:

Increased risks of a needle poke (stick) injury

- There is a risk of needle stick injury to the individual counting returned needles.
- People may be dissuaded from using personal sharps containers so needles can be counted. This creates a risk of needle injury when carrying sharps in an unsafe manner.

Risks associated with breaking into or removing of community disposal boxes

- Placing a monetary value on used needles may result in people removing or breaking into sharps containers. This may increase drug litter as containers are emptied to remove the needles and can put people at risk of needle stick injury.
- If fixed box sharps containers are removed there will be nowhere to dispose of used supplies, increasing drug litter.

Wastage

- Enterprising individuals may identify that needles can be obtained for free from a harm reduction site, taken out of the package, and returned for profit. This is wasteful of harm reduction supplies and funds and may contribute to drug litter including needle wrappers.

We recommend engaging with clients

- Many communities have effective peer needle recovery programs. Buy-back funds could be invested in this type of program, which engages people who use substances in needle recovery and provides opportunities for low-barrier employment. Peer workers are best situated to know where needles are being discarded, and to engage others who use needles about safe disposal.
- People should be encouraged to take their needles back to harm reduction distribution sites/health unit where they can get further supplies, including sharps containers and be connected with other services.

BC Harm Reduction Strategies & Services (HRSS) Committee works to reduce harms caused by substance use, promote referrals to health and social services, and ensure equitable reach of harm reduction supplies to those who use drugs in BC. HRSS develops guidelines to ensure sterile supplies are available for every injection to reduce transmission of HIV and hepatitis C, and the safe disposal of used supplies. The funding for harm reduction supplies is provided by the Ministry of Health. The BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) oversees the distribution of harm reduction supplies to sites approved by the regional health authority.

The health authority collaborates with local municipalities and agencies to manage the disposal of used supplies. Safe disposal of injection supplies includes: the distribution of small sharps containers for personal use by the harm reduction program; providing large disposal containers in public spaces; health centres and other clinics and agencies accepting used supplies for disposal; peer needle recovery programs (needle sweeps) and education for safe needle disposal.

For more information on:

NEEDLE DISTRIBUTION: <https://towardtheheart.com/resource/best-practices-needle-distribution/open>

SAFE NEEDLE DISPOSAL: <http://www.towardtheheart.com/resource/best-practices-safe-needle-disposal/open>