



**Center for  
Health  
Improvement**

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**HEALTH POLICY GROUP SAYS  
CALIFORNIA MUST DO MORE TO REDUCE  
SPREAD OF DISEASE BY NEEDLE SHARING**

SACRAMENTO—A Policy Brief published today by the Center for Health Improvement recommends that California do more to lift barriers to establishing Syringe Exchange Programs (SEPs) throughout the state.

Despite overwhelming scientific evidence about the efficacy of SEPs in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C and other diseases, and the qualified support of two governors and the Legislature, a complex web of laws continues to make it difficult to establish and fund SEPs in California, and for individuals to know whether the syringes provided to them by programs are legal or not.

“Given the consensus about the value of SEPS, California should enact policies to clarify the situation and help these lifesaving programs improve the public’s health,” said Martha Saly, MSOD, co-author of the Policy Brief, “Syringe Exchange in California: Policy, Programs and Progress.”

Presenting clear evidence about the effectiveness of SEPs, a World Health Organization study included in CHI’s analysis compared 103 cities and found that the rate of HIV in cities with SEPs dropped by 18.6% each year, but increased in cities without such programs by 8.1% every year.

One startling finding of CHI’s analysis is that in the counties where the prevalence of AIDS related to syringe sharing among injection drug users is highest—Fresno, Kern, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Joaquin—there are no SEPs.

Laws differ from county-to-county and city-to-city, frustrating attempts to authorize and fund SEPs.

The recommendations in CHI’s Policy Brief are that California: should establish programs in areas of high need, create statewide standards for syringe access, support repeal of the federal ban on syringe exchange funding, allow state HIV prevention funds to be used to purchase syringes for use by SEPs, repeal laws that make possession of syringes illegal in some areas of the state, and work to fund and integrate other health services, such as drug treatment and mental health programs, through SEPs.

The entire report is available [online](#) at CHI’s website, and the authors will be available to discuss the implications of the report’s findings with members of the media in a teleconference at 9 a.m. PDT on Friday, September 7. Contact Sue Gutierrez at (916) 930-9200 or [sgutierrez@chipolicy.org](mailto:sgutierrez@chipolicy.org) for the dial-in number and access code.

The authors will be joined in the press call by Ricky Bluthenthal, PhD, Senior Social Scientist at the RAND Corp., and California Assemblymember John Laird (D-Santa Cruz), whose legislation, AB 110, would authorize use of state HIV prevention funds to purchase sterile syringes to be distributed by locally authorized SEPs. The bill is scheduled for a final floor vote in the Senate before September 12.

The Sacramento-based Center for Health Improvement is a nonpartisan, national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving population health and encouraging healthy behaviors.

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