

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **North Dakota Develops Syringe Exchange Programs**

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) has released a guide for new syringe exchange programs (SEPs). The passage of Senate Bill 2320 allows local health units, cities and other groups in areas at risk for HIV and viral hepatitis infections to apply for program approval. In communities where people inject drugs and share needles, these programs can provide sterile equipment, education and recommendations that will help to reduce the risk of disease transmission. SEPs are another tool that can be used to reduce the public health impact an increasing opioid epidemic. The NDDoH testimony on benefits of SEPs can be viewed online at <http://ndhealth.gov/Testimony/docs/144.pdf>.

“Syringe exchange programs have been in existence in the United States for decades and have been shown to decrease the possibility of disease in people who inject drugs,” said Lindsey VanderBusch, HIV Program manager. “SEPs can be a way for people who inject drugs to get help for their addiction, and they are a safe place to dispose of used needles.”

Those interested in starting a SEP should discuss it with people in their community to develop a plan.

“Talking about having syringe exchange programs in communities can be controversial,” said VanderBusch, “However, having the discussion about whether or not SEPs are needed, will help communities find out if there are issues related to injection drug use that need attention.”

The Department of Human Services is also in support of communities looking into whether SEPs are right for their area. “Syringe exchange programs provide an important opportunity to engage individuals in discussion about their readiness to make positive changes in their lives,” says Pamela Sagness, director of the Department of Human Services’ Behavioral Health Division. “If someone identifies they would like to stop using substances, the programs will have trained staff available to connect the individual to treatment or recovery support services.”

To find the guidance, visit [www.ndhealth.gov/hiv/sep](http://www.ndhealth.gov/hiv/sep).

For questions, contact the ND HIV Prevention Program at 701.328.2378 or by emailing [disease@nd.gov](mailto:disease@nd.gov).

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