

An expanding population with unmet needs: a survey of people who use peptides, anabolic steroids, or other performance and image enhancing drugs in the context of needle and syringe programs

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Introduction:

Use of performance- and image-enhancing drugs (PIEDs) is commonly reported among people accessing Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs); however, gaps remain in understanding their characteristics and needs.

Methods:

An online survey of people who use PIEDs was launched at Kirketon Road Centre's (KRC) NSP and Sydney Sexual Health Centre on 1 March 2026. Descriptive analyses were conducted on 95 complete responses collected to 30 April 2026, and findings were compared with a similar KRC survey from 2014.

Results:

Compared to 2014, when all participants were male, the 2026 sample included women (21%) and non-binary participants (3%). In the past three months, 51% reported using peptides only, while 42% used anabolic steroids (75% of whom also used peptides); 36% initiated use within the past six months.

NSPs were the primary source of injecting equipment for 76%, though 58% attended monthly or less, and some reported difficulties accessing equipment via pharmacies or online. Most (64%) reported improved injecting practices due to NSP engagement.

While experiences of PIED use were generally positive, 31% reported continuing use despite unwanted effects. Nearly half (47%) had never had a health appointment related to PIED use, while 49% had accessed HIV and hepatitis C testing. Risk behaviours included being injected by others (43%), injecting others (30%), and sharing vials (9%); no needle sharing was reported. Additionally, 22% had more than five sexual partners in the past 12 months.

Discussion and Conclusions:

People who use PIEDs and access NSPs represent a diverse and growing group with evolving health needs.

Implications:

There is limited clarity regarding the role of NSPs in supplying injecting equipment and delivering services for this population.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *Dr Phillip Read has received research funding from Gilead Sciences, as well as institutional and individual honoraria from Gilead Sciences, Abbvie and MSD. No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.*