

# Needle and Syringe Programmes in Prisons: A Global Overview

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Laurence Stocking

Photo taken in Joyceville Penitentiary, Ontario



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# “Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”



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## “Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”

1. High rates of both HIV and hepatitis C among persons in detention worldwide



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## “Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”

2. Injecting drug use and the sharing/reuse of injecting equipment is widespread in prisons and places of detention



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## “Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”

3. Evidence of blood-borne virus transmission/outbreaks of infection among individuals/networks of people who inject in prisons



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“Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”

## 4. Needle and Syringe Programmes are Public Health Best Practice



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“Why Prison Syringe Exchange?”

## 5. Human Rights Obligations



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## Prison Syringe Exchange: The Beginning



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## Prison Syringe Exchange: The Beginning

- 1992/93 – First prison needle exchange program established in Oberschöngrün prison for men in Switzerland
- June 1994 – Second Swiss program established in Hindelbank institution for women.
- 1995 – Hindelbank project scientifically evaluated



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## Prison Syringe Exchange: Expansion

Country	Year of Initiation	Current Status
Switzerland	1992/93	7+ prisons
Germany	1996	1 prison (down from high of 7)
Spain	1997	20+ prisons
Moldova	1999	13 prisons (+3)
Kyrgyzstan	2002	12 prisons
X Belarus	2003	None
Luxembourg	2005	2 prisons
X Iran	2006(?)	None
Armenia	2006	11 prisons
X Romania	2008	None
Tajikistan	2010	1 prison
Canada	2018	2 prisons



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Canada

### Canada to test first needle exchange program in a North American prison

Program aims to stop the spread of infections such as HIV, Aids and hepatitis C among inmates who are drug users

Leyland Cecco in Toronto

Tue 15 May 2018 16.40 BST



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This article is over 4 months old



▲ The pilot project will be launched in a men's facility in New Brunswick and a women's prison in Ontario - both chosen for high rates of injection drug use. Photograph: Rick Callahan/AP

Canada is set to test the first needle exchange program in a North American prison in a bid to stop the spread of infections such as HIV, Aids and hepatitis



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## Models of Distribution: Machines



**Anonymous Syringe  
Dispensing Machines**  
**Lichtenberg Prison  
Berlin**



**Saxerriet Prison  
Switzerland**



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## Models of Distribution: Hand Distribution

**Harm Reduction Kit  
Soto de Real Prison, Madrid**



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## Models of Distribution: Peer Distribution



**Prison Colony 18 Branesti, Moldova**



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## Programme Evaluations

- Scientific evaluations have been conducted in at least 11 prisons with syringe distribution programmes
  - 1) The provision of syringes did not lead to an increase in drug consumption or an increase in injecting
  - 2) Syringes were not used as weapons, and safe disposal of used needles was not a problem
  - 3) Syringe sharing disappeared almost completely
  - 4) In prisons where blood testing was performed, no new cases of HIV or hepatitis infection were found



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes effective in reducing risk behaviour and preventing disease transmission?

**YES**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes effective in reducing risk behaviour and preventing disease transmission?

**YES**

- Do prison syringe exchange programmes encourage drug use or injecting among non-injectors?

**NO**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes effective in reducing risk behaviour and preventing disease transmission?

**YES**

- Do prison syringe exchange programmes encourage drug use or injecting among non-injectors?

**NO**

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes safe?

**YES**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes effective in reducing risk behaviour and preventing disease transmission?

**YES**

- Do prison syringe exchange programmes encourage drug use or injecting among non-injectors?

**NO**

- Are prison syringe exchange programmes safe?

**YES**

- Do syringe exchange programmes have other positive outcomes on prison health?

**YES**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are syringe exchange programmes suitable for different prison environments?

**YES**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are syringe exchange programmes suitable for different prison environments?

**YES**

- Do prison syringe exchange programmes undermine abstinence-based programs?

**NO**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are syringe exchange programmes suitable for different prison environments?  
**YES**
- Do prison syringe exchange programmes undermine abstinence-based programs?  
**NO**
- Is the provision of bleach alone a sufficient response to the risk of HIV/HCV transmission via syringe sharing among prisoners?  
**NO**



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## Review of the Evidence and Experience

- Are syringe exchange programmes suitable for different prison environments?  
**YES**
- Do prison syringe exchange programmes undermine abstinence-based programs?  
**NO**
- Is the provision of bleach alone a sufficient response to the risk of HIV/HCV transmission via syringe sharing among prisoners?  
**NO**
- Is the provision of methadone alone a sufficient response to the risk of HIV/HCV transmission via syringe sharing among prisoners?  
**NO**



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## Conclusions



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## Conclusions

- Prison syringe programmes are a pragmatic and necessary health response to the problems of HIV, HCV and injecting drug use that have been proven to be effective and safe



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## Conclusions

- Prison syringe programmes are a pragmatic and necessary health response to the problems of HIV, HCV and injecting drug use that have been proven to be effective and safe
- No matter how effective in practice, prison health initiatives related to injecting drug use remain controversial



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## Conclusions

- Prison syringe programmes are a pragmatic and necessary health response to the problems of HIV, HCV and injecting drug use that have been proven to be effective and safe
- No matter how effective in practice, prison health initiatives related to injecting drug use remain controversial
- There is an urgent need for leadership from government officials and prison authorities on the issue of prison syringe programmes



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Thanks

Harm Reduction International  
Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network  
Irish Penal Reform Trust



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