



Access to needles, syringes and opioid replacement therapies (ORTs) in the west

This position statement outlines HealthWest Partnership's commitment to ensuring access to needles, syringes and opioid replacement therapies (ORTs) across the western metropolitan region.

Why is this an issue?

Injecting drug use and its associated harms are a public health issue requiring a pragmatic, evidenced-based response.

HealthWest believes that people who inject drugs are equal members of the community and have equal right to access the services they require to maintain and promote their health. HealthWest also believes that these services should be available locally and be integrated as part of a person's general health care to ensure the best health outcomes.

Access to needle syringe programs and ORTs is an issue of human rights. Over the past 10 years, demand for harm reduction services has increased across the western metropolitan region yet availability is limited in some areas, creating additional health inequities for a population group that often experiences poor health outcomes.

Needles syringe programs and opioid replacement therapies form part of an evidence-based, harm reduction approach to injecting drug use. Needle syringe programs have significant, widely demonstrated benefit to both the individual and the community. Research demonstrates that needle syringe programs have played a significant role in preventing the spread of blood borne viruses such as HIV, Hepatitis B Virus and Hepatitis C Virus in Australia. Economic analysis of the benefits of needle syringe programs suggests that for every dollar invested, \$4 is returned in direct savings and \$27 returned when looking at indirect benefits, such as productivity gains.

Similarly, the introduction of ORTs in Australia have played a significant role in reducing drug-related harm. ORTs have found to reduce blood borne virus risk factors, reduce mortality, reduce crime, as well as reducing heroin use.

What will HealthWest do?

HealthWest supports harm reduction as a critical principal of drug policy, programs and practice. Harm reduction does not condone licit or illicit drug use but acknowledges that it occurs in the community. Harm reduction accepts that many people are unable or unwilling to stop using drugs at any given time. It also advocates that, when drug use occurs, the individual and the wider community benefit from efforts to reduce the harms associated with its use.

HealthWest has released the *No longer just an inner city issue* report that explores access to harm reduction services in the west and makes recommendations for action. HealthWest will continue to support the implementation of these recommendations and calls for additional investment in evidence-based, harm reduction services in the west to ensure the positive impact of these services continue into the future.

Endorsed by the HealthWest Partnership Board

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