

Dear [insert]:

As national organizations dedicated to expanding access to drug treatment services, we write to express our support for lifting the federal ban on funding of syringe exchange programs so that states and localities will have the flexibility to adopt these programs, if they so choose.

Drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing condition. Syringe exchange programs help people avoid HIV and hepatitis infection at the same time that they link clients to drug addiction treatment. These services are urgently needed. Today, injection drug users account for 16% of all new HIV infections in the United States.

Numerous scientific studies establish that syringe exchange programs, when implemented as part of a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention strategy, are an effective HIV prevention intervention and do not promote drug use. The National Institute on Drug Abuse advises that, “A comprehensive approach should include such services as community outreach, HIV testing and counseling, drug abuse treatment, access to sterile syringes, and services delivered through community health and social service providers.”

Syringe exchange programs successfully link people to drug treatment services:

- A national study found that 86% of syringe exchange programs refer participants to addiction treatment services.
- Participants in a Seattle syringe exchange program were five times more likely to enroll in a drug treatment program than drug injectors outside the program.
- The Baltimore syringe exchange program reserves 400 slots in drug treatment facilities. It has enrolled 2,300 people in drug treatment programs. An independent evaluation found that participation in the program was associated with entry into drug treatment programs.

We therefore support revocation of the federal ban on federal funding for needle exchange programs in order to allow interested states and localities the financial flexibility to implement evidence-based HIV prevention initiatives.

Sincerely,