

Needle and Syringe Program (NSP)

Who we are

The Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) is a cost effective and important public health program established to prevent the transmission of blood borne viruses (BBV) among people who inject drugs (PWIDs) thereby minimising the impact on the wider community. This anonymity based program was implemented within the local area in 1997 as a response to the HIV epidemic. The service continues to be a key strategy in the control of hepatitis C and hepatitis B, both of which also pose significant public health concerns if left unmanaged.

The NSP is delivered within a harm minimisation framework. It aims to reduce the harmful effects of drugs on the individual and on society, by reducing the social and economic impacts of blood borne virus transmission. Harm minimisation recognises that drug-use is an inevitable part of society and that it occurs across a continuum, from experimental, to occasional or dependent use. While the main priority of the NSP is the prevention of blood borne viruses, referrals to drug treatment and other health and welfare services remain key aspects of the program.

The South Court Primary Care team, located on Nepean Hospital Campus are a highly experienced and multidisciplinary team of health professionals who provide holistic services to meet the health needs of their clients. They are a small but effective and skilled team made up of Registered Nurses, a Social Worker and Health Education Officers.

What we do

The NBMLHD NSP is a small multidisciplinary team who:

- provide a range of needle and syringes
- provide condoms and lubricant
- provide community sharps disposal services
- deliver education, health promotion and brief interventions
- facilitate referral to health, welfare and community services as required



- support secondary outlets with staff training, supply of sterile injecting equipment and educational resources
- support local pharmacies to participate in the NSW Pharmacy Fitpack Scheme
- collect and report service utilisation and distribution data to the Ministry of Health
- work in partnership with partner services to deliver specific programs eg sexual health clinics, hepatitis education screening and treatment and Aboriginal specific programs.

How we do it

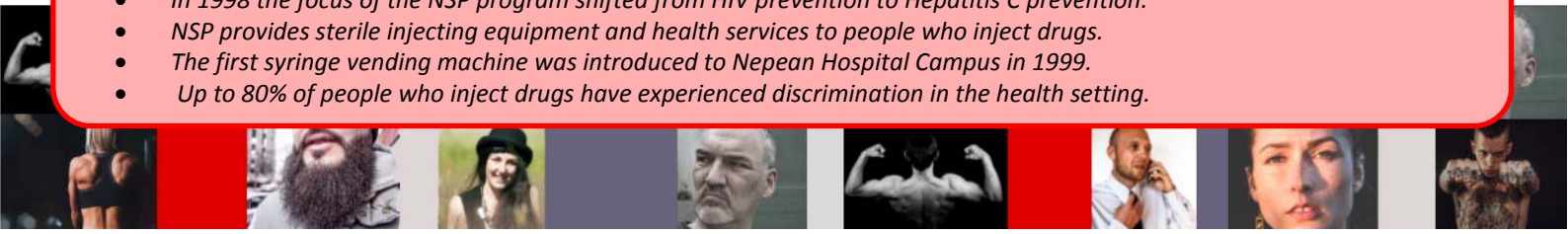
The NSP team also delivers a range of services across the LHD. Outside of the Nepean base of South Court.

Secondary outlets are staffed by health workers to provide basic anonymous access to equipment and are located at: Hawkesbury Community Health Centre (CHC), Barnardos Cranebrook (NGO), Penrith CHC, Springwood CHC, Lawson CHC, Katoomba CHC, Lithgow CHC, Hawkesbury Hospital ED, Blue Mountains ANZAC Memorial Hospital ED, Lithgow Hospital ED, Portland Tabulam Health Service, Mountains Youth Services Team (MYST) Springwood and Katoomba.

Outreach services target people who inject drugs, who might not access fixed sites. Mobile outreach is provided weekly from Nepean to Portland, while daily outreach occurs as needed across Penrith, St Marys, St Clair, Erskine Park and surrounding suburbs.

Fast Facts – Needle and Syringe Program

- *In 1987 the first NSP in NSW was implemented in response to the unfolding HIV epidemic.*
- *In 1998 the focus of the NSP program shifted from HIV prevention to Hepatitis C prevention.*
- *NSP provides sterile injecting equipment and health services to people who inject drugs.*
- *The first syringe vending machine was introduced to Nepean Hospital Campus in 1999.*
- *Up to 80% of people who inject drugs have experienced discrimination in the health setting.*



Self-serve equipment access points for quick discreet access.

- Vending machines dispense sterile injecting equipment for a nominal fee. There is considerable evidence to suggest that drug-use is not confined to regular business hours, and that vending machines increase access to sterile equipment for hard-to-reach and higher-risk populations who are less likely to access primary and secondary NSP outlets or pharmacies.
- Internal Dispensing Chutes (IDCs) provide self-serve access within facilities which are identified as secondary outlets. This service suits those people wanting more discreet free access to needles & syringes.
- Community sharps disposal bins for use by the wider population of people who need to dispose of medical sharps used for treatment such as diabetes.

NSW NSP Pharmacy Fitpack scheme (funded by NSW Health) supports its member pharmacies to participate in the program, thereby providing another source of discreet access to needles and syringes.

Needle Clean-up The NSP responds to needle clean-up calls from the community and the state-wide *Needle Clean-up Hotline* – 1800633353.

Health Promotion People who inject drugs carry the largest burden of hepatitis C infection, yet they are frequently difficult to engage in mainstream Health services. Fear of stigma and discrimination is a well-documented barrier to seeking treatment, yet by reducing the pool of infection amongst this group, hepatitis C rates, and long term health impacts can be reduced. The following Health Promotion activities aim to engage clients and the broader Health sector in improving the health outcomes of NSP clients.



Stigma, Discrimination & Injecting Drug Use
New HETI eLearning module available now for NSW Health staff

Are you aware that **80%** of PWID have experienced discrimination in health care settings

CLICK HERE to participate in the training

Health promotion initiatives include:

- *Deadly Liver Mob (DLM)* Project uses an incentive-based, peer driven intervention model for testing and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, HIV and hepatitis C.
- *Positively Hep Project* uses an incentive-based, peer-driven intervention model to recruit and educate high risk service users and to debunk the myths about hep C treatment; facilitating people's access to hepatitis C assessment and treatment.
- *NSP Smoking cessation* project is a partnership project to promoting smoking cessation to clients of the NSP through client education, brief interventions Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) to reduce the harms related to tobacco use and contribute to overall health improvement.

Why we do it

Hepatitis C & B cause inflammation of the liver and if untreated, can progress to chronic liver disease and liver cancer. While HIV compromises the body's immune system and can progress to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). All of these viruses are preventable with the appropriate access to sterile injecting equipment, support and education for those at risk.

While BBVs have a range of transmission routes, blood to blood contact with a person who carries the virus, is the most significant risk. The chance of exposure through sharing intravenous drug injecting equipment is extremely high. Since their inception in NSW in 1986, NSPs have contributed to containing the overall HIV incidence rate to less than 1% amongst PWIDs, and reduced rates of syringe sharing from an early high of 70-90% to around 17%. Hepatitis C prevalence remains steady amongst this group, with estimates of 50-70% of those people who attend NSP's having the virus.

To date NSP has prevented thousands of cases of HIV and Hepatitis C infection in the community of people who inject drugs and protected the wider population for some of the risks. At present, there are no vaccinations available for Hepatitis C or HIV however treatments have advanced significantly over recent years.

Fast Facts – Needle and Syringe Program

Investment in NSPs (2000-2009) has resulted in:

- An estimated 32,050 HIV infections and 96,667 HCV infections averted;
- Substantial healthcare cost savings to government related to HCV and HIV;
- Substantial gains in Disability Adjusted Life years.
- For every \$1 spent on the activities of NSP, more than \$4 will be returned as cost savings on health treatment.

