



commonground

The Westside Community Center *Working Together to fight HIV*

NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM (NEP)

Approximately one-third of new HIV infections can be linked to the sharing of syringes and other injection paraphernalia. Needle exchange programs are recognized as the best practice for preventing the spread of HIV among injection drug users and their families by virtually every scientific body that has studied needle exchanges including:

- U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention
- American Medical Association
- American Public Health Association and
- National Commission on AIDS



These studies have shown that Needle Exchange Programs not only prevent the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C but also act as a bridge to other agencies by providing referrals to Alcohol and Drug Treatment, HIV Testing, medical and mental health services, food, housing and other basic needs.

Common Ground's comprehensive Needle Exchange Program has been serving the Westside since 1999. Our goal is to stop the spread of HIV, Hepatitis B and C and other diseases among injection drug users, their families and communities by providing clean sterile syringes, safely disposing of used ones, and disseminating safer injecting and safer sex materials during street-based outreach.

Currently, the program reaches 800 injection drug users. All services are provided at no-cost to participants. Annually, over 120,000 needles are exchanged and safely disposed of in biohazard containers.



Several times per week, staff and volunteers at our NEP sites provide not only clean and sterile syringes, but also offer other services that address the health and well-being of injection and non-injection drug users. The program offers HIV and Hepatitis C testing, Hepatitis A/B vaccinations, wound care and overdose education. Our program is peer-driven, which means that former users have created and are implementing the NEP.

Our Needle Exchange Program has multiple financial supporters including the State of California, The County of Los Angeles and The City of Los Angeles. Both government and private foundations have identified the program as an important component of both public health and public safety.

Currently, there are less than 200 needle exchange programs in the United States - with only 7 programs in Los Angeles County. Common Ground operates two Los Angeles County certified sites in Venice and one certified site in Inglewood.

For more information about our Needle Exchange Program, visit www.commongroundwestside.org.