



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Health Services Agency: Public Health Division

(831) 454-4000

Subject: Syringe Services Program Biennial Report 2019-2020

Meeting Date: June 8, 2021

Recommended Actions:

1. Accept and file the Health Services Agency's 2019-2020 Biennial Report for the Syringe Services Program;
2. Accept and file a report to improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners; and
3. Direct the Health Services Agency, Department of Public Works (DPW) and Information Services Department to collaborate on a) implementing the My Santa Cruz County App as a tool to address public syringe litter reporting in the unincorporated areas of Santa Cruz County; b) leveraging existing solid waste disposal resources and improving overall litter efforts of the County of Santa Cruz and Cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville; and c) jointly reporting back on progress by December 7, 2021.

Executive Summary

The County's Syringe Services Program (SSP) presents its biennial report of activities and progress over the past two years, which includes procurement of new funding and the implementation of the SSP Advisory Commission. The program also provides recommendations to improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners in the county, which includes collaboration between County departments to implement a syringe reporting system using the My Santa Cruz County mobile application (App).

Background

What is a Syringe Service Program?

Syringe services programs (SSPs) are community-based prevention programs that can provide a range of services, including linkage to substance use disorder treatment; access to and disposal of sterile syringes and injection equipment; and vaccination, testing, and linkage to care and treatment for infectious diseases.

SSPs protect the public and first responders by facilitating the safe disposal of used needles and syringes. Providing testing, counseling, and sterile injection supplies also helps prevent outbreaks of other diseases.

Nearly 30 years of research shows that comprehensive SSPs are safe, effective, and

cost-saving, do not increase illegal drug use or crime, and play an important role in reducing the transmission of viral hepatitis, HIV and other infections.

(Reference: <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/index.html>)

Background on Board Directives

On December 10, 2019, the Board directed HSA to return in June 2020 with recommendations to improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners. On June 30, 2020, HSA requested a deferral to October 6, 2020 for the recommendations, and also provided a program update related to implementation of new SSP processes.

On October 6, 2020, the Board directed HSA to return by February 2021 with a report back on the recommendations to improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners. HSA Syringe Services Program (SSP) has had limited progress on the development of a centralized syringe litter reporting system due to prioritizing the emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the program has increased collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations which conduct responsive, field-based syringe litter abatement. On February 23, 2021, HSA requested a deferral of this directive to May 2021 during the SSP Biennial Report. HSA also presented a study session on the Injection Drug Use crisis in Santa Cruz County, with presentations from the Sheriff's Office, the Superior Court, and the Health Services Agency.

Statutory Requirements

On January 1, 2006, AB547 became law and legalized services for health care providers to exchange used intravenous syringes for new clean ones (syringe exchanges) in California without the need for a declaration of a state of local emergency due to a significant risk of the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection by injection drug users. Subsequent laws passed, AB110 (2007) and AB604 (2011), which require:

“(a) The health officer of the participating jurisdiction shall present biennially at an open meeting of the board of supervisors a report detailing the status of clean needle and syringe exchange programs, including, but not limited to, relevant statistics on bloodborne infections associated with needle sharing activity and the use of public funds for these programs. Law enforcement, administrators of alcohol and drug treatment programs, other stakeholders, and the public shall be afforded ample opportunity to comment at this biennial meeting. The notice to the public shall be sufficient to ensure adequate participation in the meeting by the public. This meeting shall be noticed in accordance with all state and local open meeting laws and ordinances, and as local officials deem appropriate.”

Analysis

The analysis below represents two items:

- 2019-2020 SSP Biennial Report; and
- The recommendations to improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners.

2019-2020 SSP BIENNIAL REPORT

Attachment A *SSP Biennial Report for January 2019 - December 2020* contains the full program overview for this reporting period. HSA has shifted the reporting period to align with the calendar year. Previous reports reported on data from March through February.

The program continues to experience funding, staffing and other challenges to meet operational directives. During this reporting period, the County SSP program moved under the oversight of the HIV CARE Team in HSA's Public Health Division in order to leverage relevant funding opportunities and staff expertise to continue the program. While the SSP continues to rely on the County General Fund for primary expenses, it recently received an award through the California Harm Reduction Initiative (CHRI) totaling \$329,439 from August 1, 2020 through June 30, 2023. The CHRI funding will be used to support thoughtful incorporation of people with lived experience into the program design and delivery.

The SSP staff (including volunteers and extra-help) conducted field outreach as part of the Homeless Outreach Support activities for the COVID-19 response. Field outreach activities included distribution of information and was an opportunity to stay engaged with SSP participants who had greater barriers to access services. This outreach did not include distribution of syringes from the County-designated sites.

The program also made major adjustments to its operations to support COVID-19 safety requirements. This included limiting the number of participants in exchange, increasing physical distancing, and enforcing face coverings. Furthermore, onsite HIV and hepatitis C testing and counseling were paused due to lack of available staff and inability to maintain the initial COVID-19 PPE requirements for the close encounters. Participants were referred to HSA Clinics for these tests, as requested.

During this reporting period, the County SSP acted on directives from the County Board of Supervisors, as noted below:

| County Board of Supervisor Directives | County SSP Actions |
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| Develop a plan to manage secondary exchange; only allow up to 2 secondary exchanges per visit | Completed; implemented as of 1/1/2020 |
| Collaborate with CDPH to complete a study of syringe litter in Santa Cruz County, and report back to the Board | Completed; presented to the Board on 12/10/2019 |
| Develop ordinance to develop the seven-member SSP Advisory Commission | Completed on 10/22/2019 |
| Coordinate installation and payment of syringe kiosks in other jurisdictions, per letter from the Board Chair to the local jurisdictions | Ongoing; installed 3 kiosks in the City of Santa Cruz |

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| Improve system to monitor referrals from SSP to Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) services | Ongoing; improving coordination with HSA Clinics to monitor referrals from SSP, using Lean Six Sigma process |
| Coordinate outreach to syringe litter organizations and SSP listening sessions | Completed; initial report provided in 12/10/2019 Board item |
| Implement SSP Advisory Commission | Completed; the first meeting convened in November 2020 |
| Develop recommendations to improve syringe litter reporting and response | Completed on 5/23/2021 |
| Return with a contract or contract amendment with providers to collect syringes in “hot spots” throughout the community | Completed on 4/14/2020; agreements with Clean Team Associates and Downtown Streets Team |
| Coordinate and present a multi-disciplinary injection drug use study session for the Board | Completed on 2/23/2021 |
| Add two additional hours to Santa Cruz and Watsonville exchange sites | Completed for Santa Cruz, pending in Watsonville |
| Regular community outreach, including Grant Park neighbors | Ongoing but need to re-engage with community groups after pandemic |
| When applying for funding, HSA directed to operationalize in a manner consistent with the previous action and policy by the Board | Ongoing |

County of Santa Cruz SSP Advisory Commission

The Board directed HSA to convene a seven-member advisory commission to provide consultation and feedback on the County SSP. The SSP Advisory Commission consists of a Board-appointed member per Supervisor District and two at-large appointees both nominated and appointed by the Board. The commission is subject to the Brown Act rules, and all meeting materials are posted on the program website www.santacruzhealth.org/SSP <<http://www.santacruzhealth.org/SSP>>.

The HSA Public Health Division convened the first Advisory Commission meeting on November 10, 2020 and has since held four meetings. The commission members have been engaged with learning more about the program and provide thoughtful feedback for program improvement, which the County SSP has incorporated. This includes feedback on the recommendations for a consolidated syringe reporting system and improvements to the program website. The commission has the responsibility of staying informed on syringe services and public health strategies, reviewing related state and federal legislation, and helping to increase coordination between stakeholders.

To support these duties, it would be helpful to have consistent representation from community members who are part of the system of care supporting people who inject drugs (PWID). Since the County Health Officer and the Health Improvement Partnership's Safe Rx Coalition are subject matter experts on public health practices to reduce impacts from opioid use through harm reduction, the Board may consider requesting nominations from them for future at large vacancies on the Advisory Commission.

Planning for the next Biennial period, 2021-2022

It will be difficult to sustain current SSP programming, given the current landscape of Public Health directives, and even more challenging to add additional or expanded program activities without commensurate funding. The Public Health Division has a responsibility to ensure a sustained response for the COVID-19 pandemic, likely for the next two years, and continued provision of legally required local health jurisdiction services. In this next reporting period, Public Health will utilize a data-driven approach to assess and prioritize programs and services based on mandates, community health needs and resources available to improve, protect and promote overall population health.

During this reporting period, the Harm Reduction Coalition of Santa Cruz County became a state-authorized syringe service program. As there are now two legally authorized syringe service programs in the county, the County SSP will continue to assess any changes in utilization of its own services to inform future program planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE SYRINGE LITTER REPORTING AND RESPONSE THROUGH A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM ACROSS ALL PARTNERS

Attachment B *HSA Recommendations for Consolidated Syringe Litter Reporting and Response*, includes the full report on this Board directive.

Expansion of syringe collection efforts will not be possible without additional resources. To improve syringe litter reporting and response through a centralized system across all partners, HSA's recommendations are centered around leveraging the existing infrastructure for litter collection and promoting collaboration among County departments. A summary of the recommendations includes the following:

1. Relevant County departments, such as HSA and DPW, should continue to collaborate on countywide strategies to reduce syringe litter.
2. Maintain existing syringe disposal strategies through the County SSP, such as the kiosk program, across all jurisdictions.
3. Leverage existing litter-cleanup infrastructure for syringe litter response, including expansion of contracts with litter-cleanup organizations to support syringe cleanup efforts.
4. Utilize the My Santa Cruz County App for easier reporting and response in the unincorporated county regions.

The SSP will continue to collaborate with partners to support proper syringe disposal and mitigate syringe litter, as syringe disposal is a core component of the program. The

program will continue to partner with the other jurisdictions on the deployment and maintenance of public syringe kiosks. SSP will assess the syringe-litter reporting verbiage on its website, and attempt to streamline the instructions. Moving forward, the SSP requires strong collaboration with other stakeholders to deliver a coordinated and sustainable approach for syringe litter reporting and response.

Financial Impact

SSP has FY 2021-22 proposed financing of \$265,840, including \$131,754 from a CHRI grant, and \$134,086 in General Fund contribution. FY 2021-22 proposed expenditures of \$265,840 include \$102,000 in extra-help staffing, \$46,170 in medical supplies, \$85,520 in litter abatement contracts, \$33,300 in syringe kiosk services, and \$850 in miscellaneous expenses. The budget does not reflect in-kind services provided by HSA staff across divisions of \$231,666.

Strategic Plan Elements

This item supports the following County Strategic Plan Elements:

- 1.A (Comprehensive Health & Safety: Health Equity)
- 1.B (Comprehensive Health & Safety: Community Support)
- 1.C (Comprehensive Health & Safety: Local Justice)
- 6.A (Operational Excellence: Customer Experience)
- 6.D (Operational Excellence: Continuous Improvement)

Submitted by:

Mimi Hall, Director of Health Services Agency

Recommended by:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- a SSP Biennial Report 2019-2020 - Attachment A
- b Recommendations for Consolidated Syringe Litter Reporting and Response - Attachment B
- c Public comments from May 25, 2021 BOS #08