

Prevention

Point

Pittsburgh

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September 18, 2007

Melanie Zimmerman, Executive Secretary
State Board of Pharmacy
P. O. Box 2649, Harrisburg, PA 17105-2649

Re: Proposed regulatory change on sales of hypodermic needles and syringes

Dear Ms. Zimmerman,

I am writing on behalf of Board of Directors, staff, and most of all clients of Prevention Point Pittsburgh, Southwestern Pennsylvania's only legal needle exchange program, to express strong support of the proposed regulatory change to allow for pharmacy sales of syringes without a prescription.


While contaminated needle sharing is a leading risk factor HIV in the state of Pennsylvania, the only places to pick up a sterile syringe currently is Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, leaving the rest of the state with no access whatsoever. Prevention Point Pittsburgh is a very small, underfunded program, largely staffed by volunteers with limited hours of service, yet we serve clients from all over the region. Individuals struggling with addiction travel from Butler, Westmoreland, and surrounding counties, as well as from cities as far away as Erie and Johnstown to obtain sterile syringes to protect themselves from life-threatening diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C. While injection drug use is driving the transmission of blood borne disease, sterile syringes are alarmingly scarce in Pennsylvania. Denying access to sterile syringes *requires* disease to spread among not only injectors themselves, but their sexual partners, their children, and the wider community.

Extensive research has indicated that increased access to sterile syringes is an essential component in effective prevention of blood borne disease. Pennsylvania is the last state in the country that has yet to make this regulatory change.

We would also encourage the Board to consider removing the restriction on the number of syringes that can be purchased at one time. Restrictions on the number of syringes a person can purchase increase the likelihood that syringes will be re-used and potentially shared, and run counter to the Centers of Disease Control's recommendation of one-syringe-per-injection for injectors of both licit and illicit drugs. Most other states do not have a restriction on the number of syringes purchased at a time.

We urge the Pennsylvania Pharmacy Board to move forward expeditiously on the proposal to eliminate the requirement of a prescription when purchasing syringes in PA. The health of Pennsylvania is at stake.

Sincerely,


Renee Cox, MPA
Executive Director
Prevention Point Pittsburgh

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