

Establishing Safe Consumption Sites

Health Equity Council

Executive statement

Safe Consumption Sites (SCS) are facilities where people who use intravenous drugs can use previously obtained drugs in a safe and medically supervised environment. Establishing SCSs as part of a comprehensive strategy to address the opioid epidemic is a harm reduction model that will have net positive impacts on public health and public order.

Background

Albuquerque has high rates of substance use and misuse, especially among people experiencing houselessness. With the absence of public health measures to reduce harm during use, public consumption of substances can result in public health and safety issues. Studies show that SCSs can result in decreases in overdose, overdose mortality, syringe sharing, unsafe injection practices, injection related injuries, and other unsafe side-effects. At community levels, SCSs can result in decreases in demand for ambulance services, decreases in healthcare costs, increase in access to external detoxification services, improvements in public order, referrals to treatment and social services, and increase in livability of communities with no increase in crime. SCSs can provide safety from street-based gendered violence and enable women to exercise agency in consumption.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Publicly fund Safe Consumption Sites

Allocate public funds to establish permanently placed sites in high-use areas, with multiple smaller and mobile sites.

Recommendation 2: Authentic Humanistic Engagement

Inclusion of people who use drugs is critical to the effectiveness and success of SCSs. Planning, design and implementation must be informed by people with lived experience.

Recommendation 3: Seek buy-in from community and health policymakers

Trust with the community and especially historically marginalized communities must be established first. Securing political, health and community leaders in community engagement can improve local residents' understanding of the purpose of the site.

Recommendation 4: Low Threshold and Safe Access

Access to the site should be low-threshold to provide access to all and minimize legal barriers that have been shown to be a deterrent to seeking services.

Recommendation 5: Peer-Led, Gender-specific and Culturally Responsive

Peer-led services can enhance access rates, build trust, and improve quality of care. Culturally responsive services aligned with women's needs is essential in reducing gendered and racialized risks.

Recommendation 6: Decriminalization

Decriminalization of substances can provide the highest level of legal protection against harm. Public health research shows improvement in public safety and health outcomes in the decriminalization of substance use and substance use treatment services.