D.C. Funds Needle Exchanges to Fight HIV

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Aiming to cut the District of Columbia's HIV infection rate—the highest in the United States—President George W. Bush signed a $555 billion federal spending bill on December 26 that includes a provision permitting the district to use city funds to start needle exchange programs, the Associated Press reports (ap.google.com, 12/27).

The article quotes district congressional delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton, who says that $1 million of the spending bill will fund the needle programs. Norton claims in the story that the ban on city-funded programs has contributed to the rapid spread of HIV throughout the city, where an estimated 20 percent of new infections are attributed to needle sharing.

In 1998, the Associated Press adds, Kansas representative Todd Tiahrt and Missouri senator John Ashcroft blocked city funding for needle exchange programs, citing Canadian reports that suggested that they were ineffective in preventing HIV transmission and that they may contribute to drug overdoses. Authors of those studies have subsequently said that Tiahrt and Ashcroft misunderstood their findings.

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