Hoosiers & HIV

Why needle exchanges are needed in Indiana and Wisconsin

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More than 100 residents have contracted HIV in southeastern Indiana since December, most of them through sharing needles while injecting a prescription painkiller called Opana.

Although Hoosiers don't need a prescription to buy needles, doing so requires registration. To promote clean needle usage, Governor Mike Pence OKed a short-term needle exchange in hard-hit Scott County. But activist and local Indiana University professor Carrie Elizabeth Foote tells Healthline that such measures will fail because state laws are linked to nondisclosure. "It's only after people know their status that one could be potentially criminalized," she says, "so folks who do not know their status are not at risk." Meanwhile, the state health department launched a "You Are Not Alone" campaign to raise awareness of HIV testing, safe sex, needle disposal and drug abuse. Perhaps Indiana should also restore funding for Planned Parenthood. According to the Huffington Post, Scott County has been without an HIV testing site since its Planned Parenthood facility, which didn't provide abortions, was shuttered two years ago.

In related news, a spike in heroin use has spurred the AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin to promote its needle exchange program. In 2010, the center exchanged 1 million needles; last year, that number tripled to 3 million through 15 locations.

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