Why Syringe Services Have Never Been More Vital Than Now

Here’s a best practices guide for adapting harm reduction strategies to navigate winter and COVID-19.

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This winter is likely going to be a long and dark one for many of us, particularly those of us who use drugs. Overdose deaths have never been higher while COVID-19 rates are rising exponentially and COVID-related deaths are skyrocketing.

On top of all this, millions of Americans are facing profound mental health problems associated with COVID-related traumas ranging from the loss of loved ones and physical health to the loss of jobs and housing.

Syringe services programs (SSPs) have never been more vital than they are right now, and we need to make sure that the staff and clients who run and utilize these harm reduction hubs can do so as safely as possible during the pandemic.

Over the summer, many SSPs responded to the COVID pandemic by taking their services outside when they could to lower the chances of COVID transmission, but with winter weather upon us that response is no longer as viable.

To address this issue, AIDS United, the Coalition for Syringe Access and NASTAD have created a best practices document for drug user health programs, public health agencies and people who use drugs and engage in sex work. This document offers guidance to adapt to the changing weather and continue engaging in the harm reduction activities that save so many lives and can help us end the overdose crisis.

“SSPs, Winter Weather and COVID-19: Recommendations for Harm Reduction, Service Provision and Public Health” is available now on NASTAD’s website.

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