

HARM REDUCTION POLICIES

THE SAFER, MORE EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVE TO
THE "WAR ON DRUGS"

HARM REDUCTION

*incorporates safer use, managed use, and abstinence into holistic policies to address the conditions of drug use along with the use itself*¹

WHY IT MATTERS

- Americans are 5% of the world's population but account for 80% of global opioid consumption!¹
- In 2017, 47,000 Americans died from opioid overdose and 1.7 million Americans suffered from opioid related substance-abuse disorders?²
- Illicit opioid use increases the spread of HIV, hepatitis C, and other infectious diseases, blood-borne pathogens, & skin/soft tissue infections?³
- The Economic burden of the opioid epidemic is \$504 billion per year.⁴
 - Over ½ of costs come from increased health care, substance abuse treatment, and criminal justice costs; over ¼ of costs are borne by the public sector.⁵

PUNITIVE PROGRAMS ARE A PROBLEM

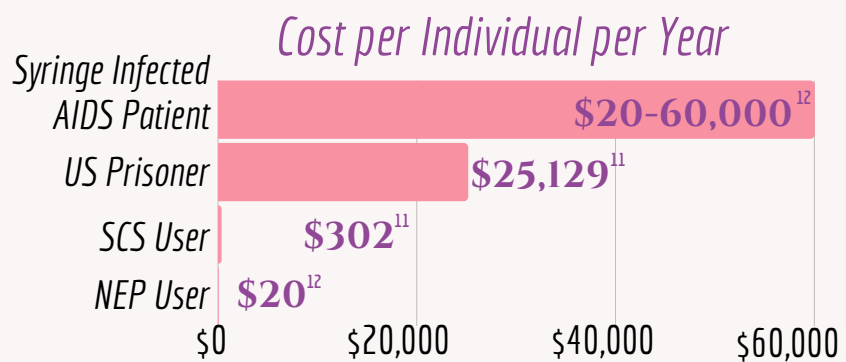
- Punitive drug reduction programs treat drug control as a **fight against crime and criminals**, as opposed to a **public health concern**.¹
- In the US, the majority of resources spent on curbing illicit drug use is spent on the **enforcement** of drug laws and the **punishment** of drug users, rather than **prevention** techniques, **rehabilitation**, or mental and physical health **intervention or support**.⁶
- **Incarceration** is a **poor deterrent** against future opioid use. The **leading cause of death** among recently released individuals is **overdosing**, with a 129% greater risk of death by overdose than the general public in the two weeks after release.¹

TERMS TO KNOW

OPIOIDS	Pain relieving drugs such as heroin, fentanyl, and oxycodone. ⁹
OPIOID EPIDEMIC	Widespread misuse of both prescription and non-prescription opioids in America. ⁹
PUNITIVE DRUG PROGRAMS	The imprisonment and criminalization of people who use illegal drugs. ¹⁰
SAFE CONSUMPTION SITE (SCS)	Sites where people can use pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of trained staff who can intervene and prevent fatal overdoses. ⁸
NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM (NEP)	Programs provide access to free, sterile needles and syringes, and facilitate safe disposal of used syringes. ⁸
"CRACKHOUSE STATUTE"	Controlled Substances Act Section 856: it is illegal to manage any place for the purpose of unlawfully using a controlled substance. ⁷

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

- Each \$1 spent on a SCS would generate \$2.33 in savings, for a total annual net savings of \$3.5 million for a single 13-booth SCS- making SCSs 98.8% cheaper than sending drug-users to prison.²⁰
- NEPs provide savings of \$1.3 million per year, four times their operation costs.¹²



GLOBAL RESULTS

Barcelona, Spain: overdose deaths/year decreased from 1,833 in 1991 to 773 in 2008¹⁷

Vancouver, Canada: 50% decrease in the number of drug users injecting in public¹⁸



Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: over 300,000 kits of fresh needles and syringes distributed per year¹⁹

Brasília, Brazil: 62% reduction in HIV infection rates among NEP users¹⁹

Sydney, Australia: SCS clients were 44% more likely to start drug treatment than nonclients¹⁸

THE LEGALITY OF HARM REDUCTION

- States and some municipalities have the power to authorize harm reduction programs under the state “police power,” doctrine.¹⁴
- Health agencies in all states have rule-making authority to protect public health.¹⁴
- 12 states have laws banning NEPS; federally, they are legal, but federal NEP funding is banned.¹⁴
- In October 2019, the Justice Department sued Philadelphia-based SCS *Safehouse*, claiming it violated the “Crack House Statute”.¹⁵
- U.S. District Judge Gerald McHugh found that *Safehouse* **did not violate federal law**, finding that its purpose was to **save lives and reduce drug consumption**, not facilitate drug use- making it the **first legally sanctioned SCS in the US**.¹⁵

POLITICAL FEASIBILITY

- Public acceptance of SCSs and NEPs are high in most of the locations where they have been established, despite concerns of low public approval.¹³
- In 2019 the California State Senate passed a bill that would allow San Francisco to operate a pilot SCS program and grant legal immunity to the drug users who visit them.¹⁵
- In 2019, the US Secretary of Health advocated for country-wide expansion of NEPs.¹⁶
- There are currently 357 NEPs across 39 states.⁸
- Across 8 states, there are thirteen proposed SCSs seeking approval.⁸

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