

Healthy Communities Strategy Syringe Exchange Programs

Strategy Purpose

The opioid crisis has resulted in a rise in overdose deaths and increases in communicable diseases such as HIV and hepatitis tied to injection drug use. Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP) are an effective solution to slowing the spread of communicable disease by offering secure syringe disposal and reducing the sharing and reuse of syringes. As a trusted source for safe syringes, SEPs also serve as an entry point for referral to treatment services for those struggling with substance use disorder.



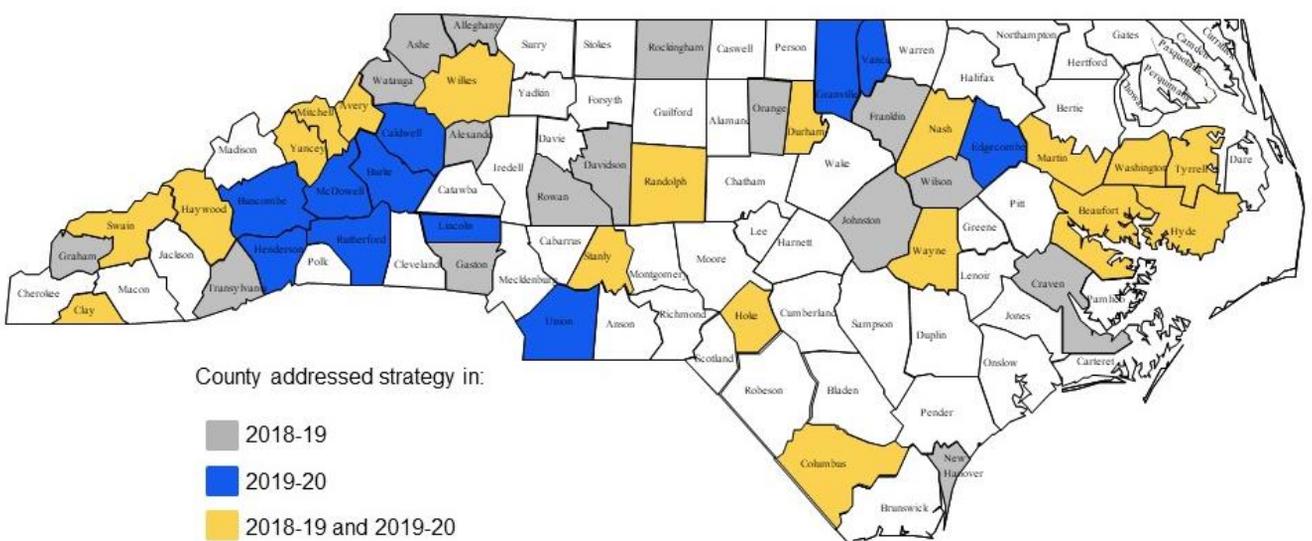
This Healthy Communities strategy focuses on increasing the number of operating SEPs in NC as well as the number of community partners enlisted to provide referrals to established SEPs.

Why Syringe Exchange Programs?

- Approximately 20 percent of AIDS cases and upwards of 55 percent of Hepatitis C (HCV) cases can be attributed to injection drug use¹.
- People engaged in SEPs are five times more likely to enter treatment for substance use disorder than non-participants².
- SEPs are cost-effective. The estimated lifetime cost of treating one person living with HIV is nearly \$450,000. SEPs are associated with an approximately 50% reduction in HIV and HCV incidence. Thus, upfront investment in SEPs can save lives and money^{3,4}.

Strategy Participation

In total, 38 District or Local Health Departments (LHD) covering 45 counties have worked on this strategy from 2018 to 2020.



1. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative/syringe-exchange-faqs>
2. <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/opioid-epidemic/syringe-and-naloxone-access>
3,4. <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-summary.html>

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Statewide Results

From June 2018, LHDs worked with local organizations and community partners to establish new SEPs. Beginning in June 2019, local Healthy Communities coordinators were able to also address this strategy by expanding the amount of community partners enlisted to make referrals to existing SEPs. Working on this strategy, local Healthy Communities programs have helped to establish at least:

20

new SEPs across North Carolina since June 2018.

and

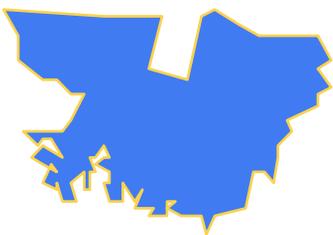
56

new partners enlisted to refer individuals to existing SEPs since June 2019.



Common partner types enlisted to provide referrals to existing SEPs include faith-based organizations, law enforcement, nonprofits, and hospitals and/or other healthcare facilities.

Local Spotlight:



The **Hyde County Health Department (HCHD)** utilized Healthy Communities funding, and other funding streams, to establish a mobile SEP in 2018-19, and to significantly expand the SEP's available services in 2019-20. With a high-priority focus on increasing staff capacity, HCHD increased training opportunities for staff and received multiple grants to help expand their services.

Since June 2018, HCHD secured a grant for \$71,673 from the NC Harm Reduction Coalition's HepConnect Initiative to expand program evaluation staff capacity and to purchase a vehicle solely for mobile SEP purposes. Through a collaboration with surrounding counties, a grant of \$294,493 from the U.S. Department of Justice enabled HCHD to fund peer support specialist positions. Since its creation in May 2018, HCHD increased SEP staffing to include an NC Certified Peer Support Specialist, a Substance Awareness Program Coordinator/Patient Treatment Navigator, and a Registered Nurse. With increased staffing capacity, the SEP was able to expand services offered to include peer support, testing for Hepatitis C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, counseling, and referrals to other community programs.

Though still a new presence in Hyde County, HCHD increased local trust by conducting community outreach to distribute naloxone kits, condoms, and educational brochures. They also continue to enlist local businesses to keep SEP flyers in sight of their customers for referral purposes, while advertising their services on social media.

