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Safe Injection Facilities

Supervised injection rooms are legally sanctioned facilities where people who use intravenous drugs can inject pre-obtained drugs under medical supervision. The movement for safe injection facilities (SIF) seeks to recognize and combat the current heroin epidemic in New York State. SIFs play a unique and vital role as part of a larger public health and treatment approach to drug policy. SIFs are intended to complement, not replace the existing prevention, harm reduction, and treatment interventions.

Scope of the Problem

In the past decade (2007-2017), there has been an upward trend in heroin related overdose fatalities among New Yorkers. State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli has suggested that New Yorkers are significantly more likely to be admitted to treatment for heroin use compared with people in other U.S. states (OCS, 2016). State officials, health professionals, and everyday citizens are recognizing that more policies need to be put in place to combat this crisis. Heroin and opiates are now the leading cause of accidental death in New York State, outnumbering homicides (NYSAC, 2016). According to the Office of New York State Comptroller, New Yorkers are significantly more likely to be admitted to treatment for heroin use or prescription opioid abuse compared to other states, but the resources currently in place are not completely tackling the current epidemic.

Heroin usage has increased across the United States among men and women, most age groups, and all income levels. The Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports an average of approximately 75,000 New Yorkers a year were estimated to have used heroin in the two-year period from 2013 through 2014. Many advocates to combatting this crisis believe by creating a safe environment to supervise injection for those addicted to heroin, the risk of overdose would be controlled. Safe injection facilities are walk-in centers where drug users can obtain clean equipment and use their own drugs under the watchful eye of staff armed

with naloxone (New York Times, 2017). Naloxone is a medication that can treat narcotic overdoses in an emergency situation. Reports have shown that there has yet to be a single overdose death in a site anywhere in the world (New York Times, 2017). Although not all citizens of New York State believe SIFs would be effective.

Many New Yorkers want to see a change in the heroin epidemic, but believe their tax payer dollars should not be used for SIFs. Another obstacle that SIF advocates face is opposition from Governor Cuomo. Although mayor de Blasio has expressed the need for SIFs, the issue has yet to be garner support on a state wide level. The growing heroin epidemic is a major public health and safety crisis which, if not properly addressed, will lead to further addiction, disease, crime, unemployment throughout New York State.

Past Policy

In order to address the growing epidemic, New York State first took action in 2005 by creating the Opioid



Overdose Prevention Program, which made it legal for non-medical persons to administer Naloxone to prevent an opioid/heroin overdose from becoming fatal. All registered opioid overdose programs are provided with Naloxone by the NYS Department of Health (NYSDOH).

In 2011, as the number of deaths from heroin overdoses continued to increase (OSC, 2016), the State took action again, passing the Prescription Drug Reform Act of 2012. The Prescription Drug Reform Act created a prescription monitoring program which allowed physicians and pharmacists to view patients' controlled substance history. This policy was created in hopes to decrease the number of patients becoming addicted to opiates, who would eventually turn to stronger drugs such as heroin. New York decided to implement a Safe Disposal Program to dispose of prescription drugs. The Department of Health (DOH) collaborated with local law enforcement to establish secure disposal sites for controlled substances at police stations, where individuals can voluntarily surrender unwanted and unused controlled substances, so it wouldn't get into the hands of children and individuals who were not prescribed the medications (DEC, 2012).

In 2014, the NY Attorney General Schneiderman established the Community Overdose Prevention program that gives eligible law enforcement agencies funding for

Naloxone (NYSDOH, 2014). This policy allowed for first responders to carry Naloxone and administer it to opioid overdose victims. Although not an official policy, in 2015 the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse undertook a public awareness and educational campaign using public forums, media, and advertising to educate

youth, parents, healthcare professionals, and school officials about the risks associated with heroin and where to access resources to deal with these issues. These previous campaigns and policies are still being utilized

currently in conjunction with campaigns to create safe injection facilities.

Current Policy

Many advocate groups have developed and are speaking on behalf of the issue at hand. Advocates and even healthcare professionals are advocating for the need for SIFs. In May 2016, Governor Cuomo announced a statewide heroin task force charged with ending the heroin and opioid crisis in New York. Over 100 New York City

healthcare professionals signed an open letter in April of 2017 supporting safer consumption spaces and urging elected representatives to adopt safe consumption sites as a public health intervention (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017). Currently Mayor de Blasio and his New York City Council are studying SIFs and the impact they could have on the community. The Safer Consumption Services Act was proposed in 2017 by assembly member Linda Rosenthal. If approved this bill would allow for the establishment of a program to provide safe injection sites (New York State Assembly, 2017). Currently the Safer Consumption Services Act is the only bill that is being proposed for the legalization of Safe Injection Facilities in New York State.



Policy Options and Model Programs

New York State SIF Trial

A year long trial in select regions across the state should be established. A trial would allow the state to collect data to determine if SIFs are economically feasible. New York State can follow a similar model to what Vancouver Canada has created. Vancouver was North America's first legal supervised injection facility in 2003 (VCH, 2016).

Bill No. 8534 Safer Consumption Services

A bill in June of 2017 was introduced by NY Assembly member Linda Rosenthal that would enact the Safer Consumption Services Act. Assembly member Rosenthal has the support from the American Medical Association. This bill is currently pending at the Assembly Health Committee (New York State Assembly, 2017).

NYC's Study of SIFs

The New York City Council in 2016 allocated approximately \$100,000 to study supervised injection facilities. Mayor de Blasio suggested, "SIFs around the world have been shown to reduce healthcare costs, decrease HIV and hepatitis B and C rates" (Politico, 2016). The mayor spoke with advocates throughout the process.

Key Organizations

These organizations work together to advocate for the same goal of implementing SIFs.

- **The American Medical Association (AMA):** The AMA has the largest body of physicians in the U.S. supporting the proposal for SIFs. AMA leaders, by a voice vote, approved a resolution calling for development of SIFs during their annual meeting.
- **SIF NYC:** This organization started a campaign for SIFs in NYC. They are a growing coalition of public health and criminal justice reform groups and NYC residents that support SIFs.
- **The Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice:** The Katal Center is an organization located in NYC. The co-founder Gabriel Sayegh is one of the nations leading experts in the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. LEAD takes a community-based diversion approach to law violations and advocacy for addiction and mental illness.



Glossary of Terms

Safe Injection Facility (SIF): supervised injection rooms where people who use intravenous drugs can inject pre-obtained drugs under medical supervision.

Naloxone: a medication that can treat narcotic overdose in an emergency situation.

Epidemic: a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease or trend in a community at a particular time.

IDUs: injection drug user.

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Community Policy Institute

The Community Policy Institute builds capacity surrounding policy within the Capital Region. We provide researched-based policy information to our community partners who use the information to modify best practices and advocate for policies that will further the development and effectiveness of direct community engagement.

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