Creating a Virtual Learning Community for Syringe Services Programs (SSPs):
Collaborative Approaches to Capacity Building & Technical Assistance
Moya Brown-Lopez, MS, MPH, Julie Rwan, MPH, Melanie Graham, MSW

Context
The NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene’s (DOHMH) Capacity Building Assistance project (NYC CBA) provides free and customized training, technical assistance and culturally and linguistically appropriate information to empower community-based organizations (CBOs) and health departments (HDs) to increase health equity. For more information, email us at nyccba@health.nyc.gov or visit www.getcbanow.org.

Aim
• Strengthen national collaborations across HIV prevention and harm reduction programs
• Share best practices and build skills, capacity, and teamwork among frontline and management SSP staff
• Create a space for joint quality improvement activities that streamline information and resources for SSPs across jurisdictions
• Reduce the risk of HIV transmission and advance the quality of care for people who are HIV-negative and engage in high-risk behaviors (HRN), people living with HIV (PLWH), and people who use drugs (PWUD)

Background
• With an estimated 1.1 million people in the US living with HIV, approximately 36,000 people become newly infected each year, and about 15% do not know they are living with the virus.
• In 2016, the number of US overdose deaths reached 64,000 people, largely due to an explosion of prescription painkillers and heroin.
• SSPs are a harm reduction strategy, a “one-stop shop,” to reduce the negative consequences of high-risk sexual and injection drug use practices (aka needle or syringe exchange programs).
• Access to sterile needles and safe disposal of old ones significantly reduces the risk of HIV & Hepatitis C transmission.
• The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016 has allowed HDs to request federal funds to support comprehensive SSP services (EXCEPT for the purchase of sterile syringes and drug preparation equipment).
• To access federal funds, HDs provide CDC with evidence that their jurisdiction is experiencing or at-risk of significant increases in HIV or Hepatitis C due to injection drug use (IDU). HD grantees can then allocate funds to local CBOs.

Plan of Action
• Provide a collaborative virtual space for HDs and CBOs around the country who support and deliver SSPs to learn and share best practices for optimal service delivery
• Identify HDs and CBOs that have received SSP-related capacity building and technical assistance within the past five years (2013 to 2018) in order to create a focused listserv (e.g. IL, KY, TN, VA)
• Establish an online training platform to communicate with HD and CBO recipients through closed skills-building webinars
• Key topic areas:
  • SSP funding and sustainability
  • Lean thinking for SSP quality improvement
  • Harm reduction & stigma
  • Engaging priority populations, including people of color, LGBTQ+ populations, and people living with HIV (PLWH) and/or Hepatitis C

Activities & Process Measures
• By August 2018, NYC will create a learning community workplan.
• By September 2018, NYC CBA will create a listserv of SSP learning community participants.
• By October 2018, NYC CBA will develop skills-building training content.
• By January 2019, NYC CBA will host at least four virtual learning sessions with participants.

Components of a Comprehensive SSP Program
• Provision of sterile needles, syringes and other drug preparation equipment and disposal services
• Education and counseling to reduce sexual, injection, and overdose risks
• Provision of condoms to reduce risk of sexual transmission of viral hepatitis, HIV or other STIs
• HIV, viral hepatitis, STD and TB screening
• Provision of naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses
• Referral and linkage to HIV, viral hepatitis, STI and TB prevention, treatment and care services, including medication for hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and partner services
• Referral and linkage to hepatitis A (HAV) and hepatitis B (HBV) vaccination
• Referral and linkage to and provision of substance use treatment, including medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder which combines drug therapy (e.g. methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone) with counseling and behavioral therapy
• Referral to medical care, mental health services, and other support services

References
• CDC Program Guidance for Implementing Certain Components of Syringe Services Programs. 2016. https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/ssp.html

Quality Improvement Tools

Voice of the Consumer: Critical Voices to Quality
• Value Stream Mapping
• Wastes in Healthcare
• Fishbone Diagram
• Root Cause Analysis
• The 5 Whys

References
• CDC Program Guidance for Implementing Certain Components of Syringe Services Programs. 2016. https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/ssp.html