

DEMONSTRATING THE SUCCESS OF A 24-HOUR NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAM IN MELBOURNE, VICTORIA.

Amy Kirwan¹, Rebecca Thatcher², Michael Curtis^{1,3}, Paul Dietze^{1,3}

¹Behaviours and Health Risks, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia

²Salvation Army Crisis Services, Melbourne, Australia

³School of Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Presenter's email: amy.kirwan@burnet.edu.au

Presenter's email: Rebecca.Thatcher@aus.salvationarmy.org

Introduction and Aims: Needle and Syringe Programs (NSP) reduce the transmission of blood born viruses by providing sterile injecting equipment along with other forms of harm reduction such as safer sex equipment (SSE). The Salvation Army Crisis Services (TSA-CS) operates Victoria's only 24-hour staffed NSP. TSA-CS commissioned the Burnet Institute to evaluate the service by analysing service use patterns, consumer experiences, needs and outcomes, and staff experiences.

Method / Approach: Our mixed methods design involved quantitative analysis of routine service data, data specifically collected from clients for evaluative purposes, and SuperMIX cohort study data. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 consumers and 7 staff.

Key Findings: TSA-CS distributed 1,185,000 needles across 39,898 service episodes in 2018. Most service contacts (70%) occurred after hours. A greater percentage of service users after-hours were women compared to business hours (29% vs 23%). Most (88%) SSE was distributed after hours, primarily to women. Service users listed the reasons for after-hours service use as safety, convenience, social anxiety and support. Additional supports such as emotional support, material aid and first aid were routinely provided, predominately to women.

Discussions and Conclusions: The 24-hour NSP is an essential and highly regarded public health service for a marginalised group of clients, in particular women and those visiting the service after hours. The unique 24-hour staffed service model, attitudes of staff and space in which it is provided all contribute to the ability of the service to meet consumer need.

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