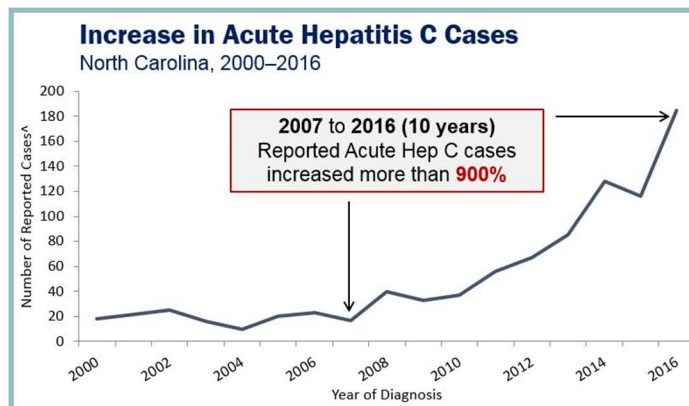


North Carolina Syringe Exchange Programs and Legal Protections

As of July 2016, North Carolina allows for the legal establishment of syringe exchange programs (GS 90-113.27). Syringe exchange programs (SEPs) distribute sterile syringes and other injection supplies and provide secure disposal of used syringes to reduce sharing, reuse, and injury. Increasing SEP access is an element of North Carolina's *Opioid Action Plan* to address the overdose crisis.

- Nearly **4 North Carolinians died each day** from unintentional opioid overdose in 2016. For every 1 opioid overdose death, there were nearly 3 emergency department visits for opioid overdose.
- Reported acute **hepatitis C cases increased more than 900%** in NC, 2007 - 2016. Hepatitis C is spread effectively through sharing syringes and injection supplies.
- Each **hepatitis C diagnosis represents about \$100,000** in medical costs. For people with Medicaid and those without insurance, each diagnosis represents significant use of public funds.
- At approximately \$0.04 per syringe, SEP is a **cost-effective** way to prevent hepatitis C, HIV, and other infections.
- SEPs also connect people to **naloxone** overdose reversal kits, hepatitis C and HIV **testing and treatment**, substance use disorder **treatment**, and other medical and social services.
- The NC Division of Public Health established the **NC Safer Syringe Initiative (NCSSI)** to promote the establishment of SEPs, share best practices, and compile data reported by SEPs.
- Prior to commencing operations, NC SEPs are required to sign up with NCSSI. SEPs must also distribute security plans to all police departments or sheriff's offices with jurisdiction in operating locations.



SEP participants are five times more likely to enter substance use disorder treatment than non-participants.

- NC's SEP law includes **limited immunity** for SEP staff, volunteers, and participants against charges for possession of syringes or other injection supplies, including those with residual amounts of controlled substances, if obtained from or returned to a SEP.
- Exchange staff, volunteers, and participants can claim this immunity by providing written verification of SEP participation, such as a participant card.
- To seek confirmation that an individual is a SEP participant, authorities may contact the relevant SEP. Contact information for NC SEPs is available at the **NCSSI webpage: www.ncdhhs.gov/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative**
- A law enforcement officer acting on good faith who arrests or charges a person who is thereafter determined to be entitled to the limited immunity shall not be subject to civil liability for the arrest or filing of charges.



Questions? Contact NCSSI at SyringeExchangeNC@dhs.nc.gov for more information.

