
Q&A

AVI's Mobile Needle Exchange

Q: Why will AVI be operating a mobile needle exchange program?

A: On May 31, 2008, AVI's fixed site needle exchange ceased operation at its Cormorant Street location. For the first time in 20 year's Victoria will be without a fixed needle exchange service. The provision of clean needles and syringes, condoms, as well as counselling and referrals, and other health services, is considered a best practice for reducing the spread of HIV and hepatitis C. One case of HIV costs the health care system over \$250,000 in direct costs, making needle exchange programs an effective way of saving health care dollars. In order to continue the struggle to stop the spread of these diseases and to link our clients with much needed services, AVI will be operating a mobile needle exchange program until it finds a new fixed site for the program.

Q: What are the strengths and weaknesses of mobile needle exchange programs?

A: Mobile needle exchange programs operate through a mobile vehicle where operators can respond to requests, and/or who have a fixed route of travel. The strength of mobile programs is that they are adaptable and accessible (i.e. go to where the clients are). Their limitations are that it may be expensive to operate the vehicle, and if the vehicle becomes too well known in the community, it may be identifiable, which could deter clients concerned with discretion. Also, some clients have limited access to telephones and/or a limited ability to coordinate themselves to meet up with a mobile exchange with a regular route. Additionally, a mobile exchange may also be limited in their ability to accept large amounts of used needles, due to space constraints in the vehicle. The mobile is also limited in the range of services it can provide to clients. Currently the fixed site provides a range of educational and health services including access to the street nurses.

Q: What services will be offered out of the AVI mobile needle exchange program?

A: In addition to the distribution and exchange of needles, the mobile needle exchange program staff will provide treatment information, referral services, prevention information (e.g. safe sex, vein care), condoms and related prevention supplies. The ability to provide education and referrals may be limited if there is a high level of demand for exchanges because workers may not be able to spend much time with clients. The mobile exchange will not have sufficient space to be able to offer counselling, or in which to help clients to help clients fill out forms or contact other agencies. Many of the needle exchange clients do not regularly access other services so these limitations could have a significant impact.



Q: What hours will the program operate?

A: Foot Outreach downtown:

Monday to Friday * 3pm to 9:30pm

Saturday * 10:30am to 5:30pm

Sunday * 1pm-5pm

Mobile Van will be parked on Princess between Government and Douglas:

Monday to Friday * 6:30pm to 10:30pm

Saturday * 6:30pm to 9:30pm

Sundays * 5pm - 9pm

SOS teams work from 3:30 until 10:30pm Monday through Saturday and from 5pm to 9pm on Sunday. For information on how to access services, please call 250-896-AVIX (2849) during these hours.

Q: Will the mobile program decrease the amount of public disorder on the streets of downtown?

A: Unfortunately, Victoria is facing many struggles in regards to high levels of addiction, and mental health issues amongst its population, many of whom are also homeless. These struggles are visible on the streets every day, and have been present near the fixed needle exchange on Cormorant Street. Moving to a mobile service will not eliminate these problems in Victoria's downtown. AVI staff will make every effort to ensure that public order around the vehicle is maintained. The Mobile Code of Conduct includes elements of maintaining public order around any stop points. For example, congregation of clients will be discouraged around the vehicle and the staff will clean up the immediate area prior to moving the vehicle

Police are also aware of the mobile route and will assist in maintaining order in those areas, if any concerns arise. AVI will also be including these areas in syringe recovery efforts and encouraging clients to dispose of their syringes safely.

Q: What do I do if I have a complaint about the mobile needle exchange program?

A: Putting all the essential elements into place to operate a mobile needle exchange program has taken considerable effort. Because this is the first time in 20 years that needle exchange services will only be available in mobile form, there will be a need to adjust the service as we put it into place. We will therefore be open to receiving feedback from clients and from the community as to whether the service is reaching clients and/or causing problems within the community. CALL 250-384-2366/

Q: Is this a permanent service?



AIDS Vancouver Island
1601 Blanshard Street, Victoria, BC V8 1N9
Phone: (250) 384-2366 Fax: (250) 380-9411
www.avi.org ~ email: info@avi.org

A: AVI's needle exchange service will be operating as a mobile program after May 31, 2008, until a permanent location is found. Best practices show that needle exchange programs which offer a variety of access points are those which are most effective in preventing disease and in addressing the other health needs of clients. The best solution for Victoria is a distributed model of needle exchange delivery – including a fixed site where other health services can be provided in tandem – which will offer the best solution for people who use drugs by injection and for the community.



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