

## Syringe Access and HIV in Louisiana

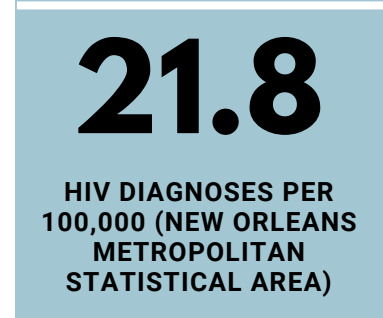
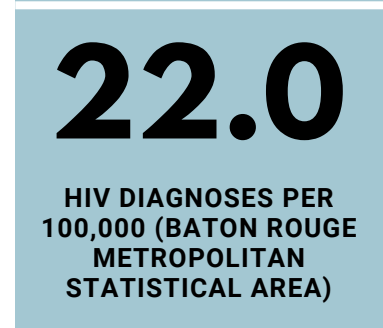
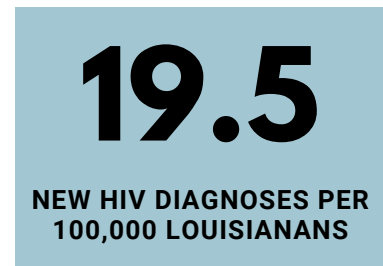
In 2021, Louisiana ranked third in the nation for HIV diagnosis rates (19.5 new diagnoses per 100,000 population) and 11th in the number of HIV diagnoses. The Baton Rouge Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) ranked fifth and the New Orleans MSA ranked sixth for HIV diagnosis rates (22.0 new diagnoses and 21.8 new diagnoses per 100,000, respectively), among the large metropolitan areas in the nation.

Sharing syringes is a high-risk activity for HIV transmission. People who inject drugs (PWID) made up approximately 10% of people newly diagnosed with HIV in 2022 and an additional 4% of diagnoses were among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men who inject drugs (GBM/PWID), a 10-year high in HIV transmission associated with injection drug use. The majority of PWID newly diagnosed with HIV were male (69%), white (53%) and 25 to 44 years old (61%) at diagnosis.

In 2021, unintentional injury was the number one non-HIV-related cause of death among people with HIV. Of the 78 deaths from unintentional injury, 66 (85%) were due to accidental drug overdoses. Making sterile syringes accessible to people who use drugs is an important approach not only for HIV prevention but also for connecting people living with HIV with healthcare resources.

Syringe service programs (SSPs) are free, community-based public health programs that provide a variety of harm reduction services and SSPs in Louisiana play a unique and essential role in ending the HIV epidemic.

1. Platt L, Minozzi S, Reed J, et al. Needle syringe programmes and opioid substitution therapy for preventing hepatitis C transmission in people who inject drugs. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2017;9:CD012021. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD012021.pub2.
2. Fernandes RM, Cary M, Duarte G, et al. Effectiveness of needle and syringe programmes in people who inject drugs – An overview of systematic reviews. *BMC Public Health*. 2017;17(1):309. doi:10.1186/s12889-017-4210-2.



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## The Benefits of SSPs

### Access to free sterile syringes and biohazard disposal

SSPs are associated with an approximately 50% reduction in HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) incidence.<sup>1</sup> When combined with medications that treat opioid dependence, HIV and HCV transmission are reduced by more than two-thirds.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Connect people to HIV/HCV testing, PEP and PrEP

SSPs provide or refer to HIV/HCV testing, PEP and PrEP for HIV prevention, medication-assisted treatment for substance use, and harm reduction-oriented primary and specialty care. These programs often act as a bridge to health services for people who have experienced barriers to medical care, including stigma.

### Start and re-engage people in HIV care and support services

Linkage to care is vital for people living with HIV. All SSPs in Louisiana have robust relationships with HIV care providers, and two SSPs even offer onsite HIV Rapid Starts and ongoing HIV care. A co-location of SSP and Ryan White services for three Louisiana SSPs allows these agencies to better provide holistic HIV care to their clients.

## Support Syringe Access as HIV Prevention in Louisiana

- Work to dismantle stigma around drug use and syringe access in your agency, family, and community. Share information about where to access syringes, including local SSPs, with your clients, your agency, and partner organizations.
- Advocate for pharmacists to sell syringes over the counter to increase access in underserved areas. Learn more about how this is supported by the Louisiana Board of Pharmacy at [pharmacy.la.gov/assets/docs/Laws/LB\\_2022.0801\\_Final-S.pdf](https://pharmacy.la.gov/assets/docs/Laws/LB_2022.0801_Final-S.pdf).
- Partner with SSPs to provide services, resources and funding.
- Pass local ordinances to legalize SSPs in your area.
- Start a syringe service program! Email [HarmReductionPortal@la.gov](mailto:HarmReductionPortal@la.gov) to learn more about starting a SSP in Louisiana.