Denver Harm Reduction Advocates Push for a Safe Injection Site

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Harm reduction advocates in Denver are pushing to establish one of the United States' first safe injection sites — legal, supervised facilities where people can inject drugs like heroin away from public places in the city, NBC's KKCO reports.

Spearheaded by Colorado's Harm Reduction Action Center, the proposal is based on existing models in Vancouver, which provide users everything they need to inject — except the drugs. Advocates say the centers would help keep needles out of public places, while also helping to reduce the risk of hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV infection by discouraging needle sharing and the reuse of injecting equipment.

By taking drug use out of the public sphere and into a controlled environment, supervised by trained professionals, advocates also argue that safe injection sites have the potential to cut back on the number of fatal overdoses in the area. Denver health officials say last year alone, at least 20 people died outside in parks, alleyways or the bathrooms of various private businesses across the city. Heroin-related deaths have also risen 23 percent in Colorado over the last six years.

The Denver Medical Society and a list of local businesses recently signed on to bring the safe injection site to Colorado. However, setting one up in Denver would require an exemption to the state's existing drug possession laws, as well as additional public support. Meanwhile, opponents of the idea have already begun to push back, saying they don't want to legitimize drug use in the city.

Currently, 63 cities in nine different countries have safe injection sites set up to help reduce the risks of injection drug use. To date, no one has died of an overdose at any of them.

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