Indiana Syringe Exchange Is Back in Business

State lawmakers shut down Madison County's only clean needle site last year amid an intensifying opioid crisis.

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A year after Indiana lawmakers voted to stop funding the only syringe exchange in Madison County, the program has reopened, thanks to a local nonprofit that has taken up the cause, Fox 59 reports.

In August 2017, county leaders caused a national outcry from health and harm reduction advocates, after they voted to stop funding the syringe exchange, which helps injection drug users access clean injection equipment to help protect them from spreading illnesses like HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV). Earlier this year, amid an intensifying opioid crisis, the county gave the nonprofit Aspire permission to take over the site.

Leaders at Aspire say it took a few months to get stakeholders on board with their plan and get the program back up and running, but the first syringes have been dispensed to residents this fall. So far, the site has been visited by 13 people, and staffers expect the number of visitors to grow as more people learn that the program has resumed.

While the program was shut down, between 2017 and 2018, the Madison County Health Department reported 10 new cases of hepatitis C—the second-highest number in Indiana. Health officials expect that number and the number of HIV cases to rise when complete data is released in the early part of 2019.

Moving forward, needles can be exchanged every Monday at Aspire's offices in Anderson, Indiana, on Mondays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Wednesdays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.

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