Philadelphia Officials OK Nation's First Safe-Injection Facility

The city has the highest rate of opioid overdose in the United States and has been seeking new solutions to combat the crisis.

January 25, 2018 By Casey Halter

The city of Philadelphia is set to become the site of the nation's first safe injection facility, a place where people who use drugs can inject under medical supervision. The city has the highest rate of opioid overdose in the United States and has been seeking new solutions to help combat the crisis, Penn Live reports.

In a news conference this week, city officials announced the controversial plan, explaining that the move is aimed foremost at reducing the number of opioid-related deaths in Philadelphia. Last year, an estimated 1,200 residents died of opioid overdoses last year, a rate nearly four times higher than the city's homicide rate. Officials did not provide a date or location for the site but said they are planning to work with medical and nonprofit organizations to fund, open and operate one or more harm reduction facilities.

Safe-injection facilities are already legal and operating in several countries, including Canada, Australia, Denmark, France, Germany and Norway. At the sites, drug users are provided clean needles to prevent and reduce the spread of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV) and supervised by security teams and medical professionals equipped with the opioid-reversing drug naloxone. Some programs also steer users to treatment and other services.

While researching the proposal, a group of Philadelphia officials visited a working site in Vancouver, while another traveled to Seattle to collaborate with officials in that city who have similar plans. Moving forward, Philadelphia's district attorney said his office will not prosecute users at safe-injection sites, while the city's police commissioner (who at first completely opposed the establishment of such a facility) is now working with an "open mind" to determine how best to secure the location.

That said, the city's decision doesn't eliminate legal hurdles to the sites. The Department of Justice has yet to weigh in on Seattle's discussions about opening such a facility. Additionally, how the federal government will treat safe-injection sites in the future — despite President Trump's declaration that opioids are a nationwide public health emergency — remains to be seen.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/philadelphia-officials-ok-nations-first-safeinjection-facility