Supporting Supervised Injection Sites

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The United States stands to benefit from supervised injection facilities, which can reduce the use of injection drugs in public places and also prevent overdoses.

This is according to a new report from researchers who studied a legally unsanctioned supervised injection site—the nation has no sanctioned programs—operated by a social service agency in an unnamed U.S. city since 2014.

During its first two years, the facility served more than 100 injection drug users, who most commonly used heroin and were mostly white males and homeless. Reflecting on the previous month, almost 7 percent said they had previously overdosed elsewhere, and 9 percent said they had used nonsterile needles during the previous month.

After more than 2,500 injections, the site saw just two overdoses, both of which the staff reversed through Narcan (naloxone).

With more than 90 percent of clients saying they would otherwise have injected at a public location, such as a restroom, street or park, the investigators estimated that the supervised injection facility prevented 2,300 public injections and led to 1,725 fewer public disposals of needles and other injection equipment.

“The scientific evidence from the existing sites is very clear: that these sites do not increase numbers of people who use drugs or the amount of drugs that people use,” says study author Alex Kral, PhD, an epidemiologist at the research nonprofit RTI International.

“On the contrary, the only things the sites enable are entry to substance use treatment and other health care services and constructive conversations with health professionals about their drug use.”

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