Willingness to Use U.S. Safe Injection Sites

A new study finds strong support for the harm reduction strategy among those most likely to use them.

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A study on safe consumption spaces has found that a majority of people who inject drugs not only support but also would be willing to use such harm reduction facilities if opened up across the country.

Published in the Journal of Urban Health, the study surveyed opioid users in Baltimore, Boston and Providence about their views on safe injection sites—where people who use heroin, fentanyl and other drugs can access sterile syringes and medical support while they inject.

Such sanctioned venues are not yet legal in the United States but have been set up and evaluated in countries such as Canada and Australia, where studies have shown that they help significantly reduce the risk of HIV, hepatitis C virus (HCV) and hepatitis B virus (HBV) transmission as well as cut down on overdoses and public drug use.

The study found that 77% of participants reported a willingness to use safe consumption spaces. Willingness to use these sites among people who relied on public spaces—such as streets, parks and abandoned buildings—to use drugs was even higher, at 84%.

“This is important because the voices of people who use drugs are not always included in policy debates or in the implementation of public health interventions,” says lead study author Ju Nyeong Park, PhD, MHS, an assistant scientist in the Department of Health, Behavior and Society at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Researchers say the willingness of opioid users to use safe injection sites suggests that such facilities would provide a safer and more viable alternative for them to using drugs on the streets.

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