

CITY OF SAN DIEGO
M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: March 3, 2004

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Dr. James Dunford, Chair
Clean Syringe Exchange Program Facilitation Committee

SUBJECT: Clean Syringe Exchange Program
Recommendation to Continue Council Declaration of Health Emergency

Recommendation: The Clean Syringe Exchange Program (CSEP) Facilitation Committee recommends the Mayor and City Council continue to declare a local health emergency concerning the continuing epidemic of Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS until results of the pilot program can be analyzed, a final report prepared, and recommendations submitted to the Council. As a result of this action, the existing Clean Syringe Exchange Pilot Program would be authorized to continue operating.

Background: Effective January 1, 2000, California State law AB136 decriminalized needle exchange programs operated by public entities provided the City or County declared a local health emergency. On October 16, 2000 the San Diego City Council made such a declaration in response to the rapid spread of the Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) and the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) through the shared use of needles and syringes; the law requires the emergency to be continued every two weeks. The continuation is on the agenda of the March 8, 2004 Council Meeting (Item 133).

The number of reported HCV cases in San Diego increased by 50 percent between 1998 and 1999, and the rate of AIDS cases in the city was the third highest in the state, a condition exacerbated by the shared use of needles and syringes by injection drug users. These circumstances caused the San Diego City Council in October 2000 to appoint a Task Force to develop and implement a one-year Clean Syringe Exchange Pilot Program with a drug abuse treatment referral component to combat the issue of drug addiction.

On November 27, 2001, the City Council voted 5-4 to accept the recommendations of the Clean Syringe Task Force outlined in their final report dated June 12, 2001. The recommendations included: 1) Declaring a local health emergency in the City of San Diego; and 2) Authorizing a privately funded one-year pilot clean syringe exchange program as described in the report. Additional direction by the Council included: 3) The initial "prevention kits" include no more than two syringes; 4) The program is not implemented within three blocks of any school; 5) The process for determining the sites

be done only with the concurrence of the Council member representing the District within which the site would be located; 6) Specific information be collected for the purposes of program evaluation; 7) The language on the proposed I. D. card be changed to state “This card has been issued to a participant in the City of San Diego’s Clean Syringe Exchange Program”, and 8) The program managers return to the PS&NS Committee six months after implementation for an evaluation of the pilot sites and consideration of additional sites if warranted.

The City’s Community and Economic Development Department has oversight responsibility for the CSEP, which is privately funded by Alliance Healthcare Foundation and operated by a nonprofit organization, Family Health Centers of San Diego. Status reports were submitted to the Mayor and City Council via memoranda dated July 17, 2002, December 5, 2002, February 10, 2003 and November 25, 2003. In addition, some elements of program operation and site selection were heard at the January 7, 2003 City Council meeting.

The first CSEP site opened downtown on July 18, 2002 – the program operates Thursday evenings from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. A second site opened in North Park on February 14, 2003 and operates Friday mornings from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Due to delays in opening the first two sites and funding concerns, the plan to open a third site in City Heights was abandoned.

FHCS staff continues to work closely with the program evaluators to ensure accurate collection of data related to all aspects of service delivery. As of February 27, 2004, the total number of visits to the CSEP is 3,412 (2,476 Downtown and 936 at North Park). These clients brought in 141,780 syringes (98,272 and 43,508 from the Downtown and North Park sites, respectively) in exchange for 106,684, resulting in a decrease of 35,096 dirty syringes in the community. In addition, CSEP staff provided 2,109 referrals to clients for treatment (111), detox (247), health (632), mental health (78) and other services (1,366).

The City Manager-appointed CSEP Facilitation Committee began meeting on October 15, 2002 and continues to monitor the pilot program. Meetings are held monthly on the first Thursday of each month at noon.

The CSEP web page went live on the City’s web site in July 2002. The web page provides an overview of the program, from the conditions that spurred its development to how it will be implemented. The CSEP Task Force Final Report is on the page and “fact”, “frequently asked questions” and “testimonials” sections serve to educate the community and address issues and concerns. Links to relevant political documents and resources as well as to the partner organizations are also included. A schedule of CSEP

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Facilitation Committee meetings, agendas and minutes are regularly posted to the web page so that interested citizens can access the current status of the program.

Discussion: The CSEP pilot study period concluded February 14, 2004, i.e., no further client interviews were scheduled after that date. SANDAG researchers are now analyzing the data collected and preparing to write a final report. That report, which will include an analysis of any changes in crime-related activities in the areas around the two program sites, is due for Facilitation Committee review in approximately 90 days, circa May 14. The Facilitation Committee expects to take another 45 days to study the results of both the community impact survey in North Park and the SANDAG report before preparing final recommendations to the Mayor and City Council. That report is expected to be presented in July after budget hearings have been concluded.

At its February 5, 2004 meeting, the CSEP Facilitation Committee voted 8-1 in favor of continuing program operations during the current period of evaluation by both SANDAG and the North Park survey team from the Social Science Research Laboratory at San Diego State University. There is no epidemiologic evidence suggesting that either the Hepatitis C or HIV/AIDS epidemics have abated over the past year. Conversely, the pilot program has demonstrated success both in referring clients to treatment and by collecting more dirty syringes than the numbers of clean syringes it provides. Since both Hepatitis C and HIV are transmitted by contaminated needles, this net reduction in dirty syringes should offer a public health benefit. As well, existing clients have become dependent upon program services and it is important to have the ability to continue referring them to treatment and medical services.

Based upon this evidence, Facilitation Committee members felt the San Diego community would be better served by retaining program operations until the Mayor and City Council can receive and decide upon our final report and recommendations (within the next five (5) months). Alliance Healthcare Foundation has agreed to fund the program through that period if the Council authorizes it. Therefore, the Clean Syringe Exchange Program Facilitation Committee urges the Mayor and City Council to continue declaring a local health emergency due to the spread of Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS.

Respectfully submitted,

James Dunford, M.D., Chair
Clean Syringe Exchange Program Facilitation Committee

cc: Hank Cunningham, Director, Community & Economic Development Department
Debra Fischle-Faulk, Assistant Director, Community & Economic Development

