



MEDIA RELEASE

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REPORT RECOMMENDS BETTER ACCESS TO NEEDLE & SYRINGE PROGRAMS TO COMBAT BLOOD BORNE VIRUSES

The Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL) is today releasing a new report on Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) in Australia, with a view to enhancing access for priority populations and reducing the impact of blood borne viruses (BBVs) in Australia.

“The report looks at the pros and cons of different types of NSPs currently operating around the country and goes on to make recommendations about ways to increase access and coverage. We already knew from previous studies that investment in NSPs between 2000 and 2009 prevented nearly 97,000 Hepatitis C infections and 32,050 HIV infections – for every dollar spent on NSPs, more than \$4 will be returned in savings to the health systemⁱ. This new study looks at ways to enhance the effectiveness of NSPs across the country to address access issues and maximise the public health benefits,” said Melanie Walker, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of AIVL.

“The report also looks at the broader benefits of NSPs, beyond directly preventing the transmission of BBVs. Primary and peer based NSP services in particular provide far more than just sterile injecting equipment. They can and do provide a range of other services including access to on-site clinical services, a point of social contact in particular among those who are homeless, and referrals to other services that may be needed. Other services include, but are not limited to, drug treatment, assistance with housing, mental health and drug counselling, legal advice and advocacy.

“However, what can be seen from these findings is that while there is an extensive and diverse system of access to injecting equipment across Australia, the experience of accessing these sites is inconsistent. At minimum, these inconsistencies create missed opportunities for people who inject drugs to engage in the health system and, at worst, may contribute to increasing rates of injecting equipment reuse or sharing,” said Ms Walker.

The report makes a series of recommendations in the following key areas that form the basis of a national best practice framework for NSPs:

- Diversity of options with consistency of experience
- Ensuring that all parts of Australia’s NSP system are welcoming and non-judgemental
- Ensuring consistency of equipment across all service types
- Creating an enabling environment that maximises the widest availability of injecting equipment
- Position NSPs as a core part of Australia’s health system
- Create pathways for employment of peers and encourage peer-employment outside of primary NSPs, and ensure that peer workers are adequately supported in the workplace
- Ensuring funding allows for flexibility of service delivery
- Creating greater service awareness and managing expectations
- Creating consistency in data collection with a focus on collecting what is required

“With the development of the new national BBV and sexually transmissible infections strategies currently underway, we are keen to ensure that the findings of this report inform future priorities at the national level,” said Ms Walker

*AIVL is the national organisation representing people who use/have used illicit drugs and is the peak body for the state and territory peer-based drug user organisations. **The full report is available at:** <http://www.aivl.org.au/resource/needle-and-syringe-programs-in-australia-peer-led-best-practice/>.*

MEDIA CONTACT: Melanie Walker, CEO, AIVL

0438 430 963

ⁱ National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (2009) *Return on Investment 2: Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of needle and syringe programs in Australia*, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.
[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/A407CF4FECBDC715CA257BF0001F98B2/\\$File/retexe.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/A407CF4FECBDC715CA257BF0001F98B2/$File/retexe.pdf)