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New Jersey's Needle Exchange Sees Success One Year Later

In an effort to reduce the spread of HIV, hepatitis and other blood-borne illnesses, the North Jersey Community Research Initiative (NJCRI) launched its self-funded needle-exchange program with just 78 clients one year ago. Today, [The Star-Ledger](#) reports, the Newark program serves about 600 regular intravenous (IV) drug users, who bring in about 500 used needles a day in exchange for clean ones.

According to the article, politicians have opposed the needle-exchange program for 13 years, citing that providing IV drug users with clean needles would only promote illegal behavior.

“People think it is enabling and increasing the use of drugs. It’s just the opposite,” said Bob Baxter, director of addiction and education services for NJCRI. “It’s a public health issue. Just saying no to people who have always said yes doesn’t work.”

While a number of studies over the years have proved that needle exchanges reduce the risk of HIV or hepatitis infection, such programs were forbidden in New Jersey until December 2006 when Governor Jon Corzine authorized four pilot operations, in Newark, Camden, Paterson and Atlantic City.

According to the state Department of Health and Senior Services, as of June 2008, nearly 40 percent of New Jersey’s 71,812 HIV/AIDS cases were linked to IV drug use.