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New Zealand
Needle Exchange [\(/index\)](/index)
Programme


(New Zealand Needle
Exchange Programme, n.d.)

1987

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Who We Are

The New Zealand Needle Exchange Programme is a nationwide programme funded by the Ministry of Health. Established in the late 1980s, it is one of New Zealand's most successful public health programmes.

New Zealand has led the world in the development of peer-based and peer-led needle exchange programmes, with an approach that is evidenced to be highly effective and subsequently has been replicated in many parts of the world. We now distribute over 3 million needles and syringes each year through a national network of dedicated outlets stretching from Kaitaia to Invercargill and a comprehensive network of pharmacies.

Today we remain peer-led and peer-based, and committed to a health and human rights based service approach for people who use drugs.

How the NEP developed

Harm reduction emerged as a paradigm during the 1980s in response to the threat posed by HIV/AIDS. Needle exchanges were one of the earliest harm reduction initiatives.

In the mid 1980s, activists from the injecting drug using community self-mobilised to develop and advocate for a safe injecting programme in New Zealand. A number of pharmacists in both Christchurch and Auckland supported the work of these early pioneers by supplying equipment for injecting drug use. Activists within the gay and sex work communities also gave support to these early developments.

On 17 December 1987 parliament enacted legislation, which resulted in New Zealand becoming the first country in the world to provide a national state-sponsored needle exchange programme.

The peer model has been a defining feature of development of the NEP in New Zealand.

Like many organizations, the NEP has grown organically. Over the last 30 years, it has taken many forms and undergone various changes. In the early days, there were over 20 trusts, each of which was locality based. These original trusts are still visible today in the names of many of the exchanges.

The NEP Today

The needle exchange programme consists of 20 dedicated exchanges, 1 mobile exchange, and 197 pharmacies and alternative outlets.

There are five trusts responsible for the operational delivery of services in their respective regions and a national trust that provides leadership and national co-ordination for the programme as a whole.

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is based on empathy and a non-judgemental approach, working with people where they are at and however they understand their drug use. Injecting drug users frequently experience stigma and discrimination; this can often present a barrier to accessing services. As peers mainly staff our exchanges, we have an established credibility and trust within the community. Needle exchanges are therefore a safe space and an important source of information and advice.

What is Needle Exchange

Needle and syringe programmes are an important harm reduction intervention. In New Zealand they are commonly known as needle exchange programmes.


People who are injecting drugs can access needles, syringes and other equipment to support safe injecting practice and reduce risk of health related complications.

Needle exchanges also provide for the safe disposal of used needles and syringes.

Contact Us

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