



# Viral Hepatitis and Harm Reduction

Daniel Raymond  
Policy Director  
Harm Reduction Coalition  
[raymond@harmreduction.org](mailto:raymond@harmreduction.org)



# Harm Reduction in Context

Emerged in 1980's as a theoretical framework for syringe exchange:

- Emphasized the urgency of preventing harmful consequences of drug use (e.g. HIV, HBV)
- Public health-based alternative supplementing goals & strategies to eliminate drug use
- Focus on out-of-treatment drug users in community settings
- Implicit challenge to stigma, criminalization, pathologization of people who use drugs



# Harm Reduction Settings as a Site for Viral Hepatitis Interventions

- Education, counseling, referrals, case management, support groups
- HAV/HBV vaccination
- HCV counseling and testing

*Syringe exchange programs provide multiple opportunities for contact with people outside of the health care system*



# Harm Reduction Implications for Prevention and Education

- Focus on realistic, incremental changes attuned to social and structural contexts of risk
- Provide meaningful and achievable alternatives to people who cannot immediately eliminate risk
- Recognize multiple competing priorities and constraints on change



# Harm Reduction Implications for Care and Treatment

- Improve the responsiveness and receptiveness of health care systems to drug users
- Bring clinical services to community settings
- Shift policy and practice from blanket exclusion to case-by-case basis
- Offer strategies and support to increase readiness for treatment, adherence, and retention in care



# Harm Reduction Implications for Alcohol Use

- Shift goals and messages away from total abstinence towards reducing the harms of alcohol use for people with chronic viral hepatitis
- Acknowledge the positive roles and functions that people ascribe to their alcohol use
- Recognize and reinforce incremental positive changes in reducing or managing alcohol use



# Harm Reduction Implications for Hepatitis C Prevention

- Increase syringe access
- Improve meaningful testing results
- Develop contextual counseling strategies
- Address risk within drug use networks
- Link prevention, testing, and care & treatment
- Promote collective ownership and community-driven strategies



# Harm Reduction Implications for Public Health Policy

- Remove the federal ban on syringe exchange funding
- Address local and state legal and political barriers to syringe access
- Engage law enforcement on public health consequences of policing practices
- Increase coordination and collaboration between harm reduction, substance abuse treatment, and medical and mental health care



# Resources

Harm Reduction Coalition

(212) 213-6376

[www.harmreduction.org](http://www.harmreduction.org)

Towards a National Policy: 7<sup>th</sup> National  
Harm Reduction Conference

Miami, FL

November 13-16, 2008