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*by V S*

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**Should Texas Legalize Needle Exchanges?**

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### **Should Texas Legalize Needle Exchanges?**

When the Criminal Justice and Public Health Panel sat down to discuss Texas's health and criminal issues, one thing became clear. There was a need to address the opioid epidemic (Uhdmediasite.uhd.edu, n.d). Harm reduction strategies that limit the problems associated with drug use are increasingly becoming prominent across the nation. Hence, needle exchange programs that allow drug users to access new syringes instead of the continuous use of the dirty ones at no cost attempt to address the federal government's failure to come up with policies and funding to alleviate this public health predicament.

Though needle exchange programs are still illegal in Texas, there are around 185 such programs worldwide. To alleviate the opioid crisis, which is estimated to kill around 500,000 Americans in the coming decade, Texas policymakers must prioritize regulation legalizing the state's needle exchange programs. In addition to that, allowing drug users to exchange dirty needles for new ones at no extra cost enables straight connection to health services in the Texas community. Furthermore, needle exchange programs have been cited to reduce infection rates of blood-borne infections like HIV because drug users can access clean needles that they use safely to inject themselves (Packham, 2019). Moreover, such programs provide the essential services to treat drug and substance abuse, disease deterrence, testing, and transfers to potential rehabilitation centers. Also, organizations tasked with needle exchange programs ensure the safe disposal of used and dirty syringes, limiting the possibility of society or civil servants coming into contact with them and acquiring serious infections.

In short, it is time to face the facts. The opioid epidemic is bound to worsen if Texas refuses to legalize the needle exchange programs. By sanctioning these programs in the state of

Texas, there will be a reduction in the number of deaths associated with opioid use, new HIV infections, and other blood-related infections will reduce.

### References

- Packham, A. (2019). *Are Syringe Exchange Programs Helpful Or Harmful? New Evidence in the Wake of the Opioid Epidemic* (No. W26111). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Uhdmediasite.Uhd.Edu. (N.D.). *Criminal Justice And Public Health Panel: Where Are We And Where Do We Need To Go?* [Video]. IIS Windows Server. <https://Uhdmediasite.Uhd.Edu/Mediasite/Play/718e08d3ebdd48c38b3257c31107a50a1d>

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