

# INJECTING ICE IN THE COUNTRY Healthier Approaches

## ENGAGING CLIENTS WHO INJECT ICE

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) are an essential part of Australia's health system. The evidence around their effectiveness is well established – it is estimated that for every one dollar spent on NSPs, four dollars are saved in direct health care costs.

NSPs are confidential and non-judgemental places where, in addition to obtaining sterile injecting equipment, clients can access:

- Information on the health risks associated with injecting.
- Advice on safe injecting practices to reduce the risk of blood-borne virus transmission including HIV and hepatitis C.
- Safe disposal advice and equipment.
- Referral to other health and welfare services.

[penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry](http://penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry)



## Background

NSP clients come from all walks of life. Some are high functioning individuals who manage their substance use and are able to reduce the harms to themselves through safer injecting practices. Other clients are less able to manage their substance use, and have a broader range of social and health issues that negatively affect their wellbeing.

Wherever NSP clients sit on this continuum, they are often subject to stigma and discrimination from commonly-held views about injecting drug use. For this reason, the NSP may be the only place where clients feel safe to access information and support services. This means that the role of NSP workers is vital.

Australia has led the way in reducing the harms associated with injecting. Australia's early adoption of NSP services has significantly reduced the HIV epidemic amongst people who inject drugs, to the extent that only 30-40 cases of HIV per year are transmitted via injecting drug use.

## Key elements in supporting clients

### Confidentiality

Building trust is a key component of supporting clients in NSPs. It is important to emphasise, when speaking with clients, that all information is treated confidentially. This includes not sharing any client-related information with friends or family, or other members of staff in the service. Signage should remind clients that their confidentiality is assured. You can access signage from [www.penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry](http://www.penington.org.au/injectingiceinthecountry).

### Being welcoming

Start by greeting clients with a smile and asking them how their day is going. Not all conversations need to be related to the service you are providing. Clients often feel the impact of stigma and discrimination in their communities, and a warm welcome can reassure clients that their health and wellbeing is a priority for you and your service.

### Being respectful

It's not unusual for vulnerable groups in our community to feel judged and ashamed of their substance use - this is particularly the case for people who inject drugs. When clients feel that they are treated respectfully, they are more likely to feel open about discussing any health concerns they have that may or may not be related to their substance use.

### Building rapport

Establishing a rapport with clients takes time. It is important to be genuine and sincere, without being intrusive. Direct and intrusive questioning can make clients feel nervous. This can particularly be the case in regional areas and smaller communities where it's harder to be anonymous and where people are more likely to know each other. Being welcoming, friendly and professional will reassure NSP clients that you and your service take their privacy and health concerns seriously. All NSPs should be safe places for clients to visit.

### Summary

The NSP service is an essential part of Australia's health system. NSP workers can play their part by treating clients with respect, care and compassion. Knowing how your work connects with other health services can help clients access a wider range of supports. Your work can have a positive impact on the lives of your clients.

Please consider contacting your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for additional services and supports for your Aboriginal clients, or visit [www.vaccho.org.au](http://www.vaccho.org.au).

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