

Case Study: NIRW community sharps management, infrastructure enhancement and awareness

COUNCIL NAME

Northern Inland
Regional Waste
(NIRW)

WEB ADDRESS

www.nirw.org.au

Overview

Councils in partnership with Northern Inland Regional Waste (NIRW) and NSW Health have improved the provision of community sharps management services to New England and North West regions of NSW. This has been achieved through the increased capture of sharps, increased community and council awareness of sharps, and a better understanding of the costs and benefits of continued service provision of community sharps infrastructure.

Background

The community and councils were concerned about 'hot spots' where sharps were unsafely disposed of. There was concern that providing disposal bins may encourage illegal drug use, with little consideration given to the use and disposal of sharps in the community for legitimate purposes, such as diabetics self-administering insulin.

A review indicated the need for a regional audit of bins, installation of additional bins if required, updating of the Safe Sharps website/app, staff training, and improved community education. In order to improve service provision and health outcomes the NIRW Community Sharps Management Infrastructure Enhancement and Awareness Program was proposed. This was jointly funded and delivered by councils, Hunter New England Local Health District, NSW Ministry of Health, and NIRW.



Figure 1: Community Sharps Promotion Material

Implementation

A regional analysis and needs assessment was undertaken, and existing disposal infrastructure mapped. Information collected included bin locations, numbers, sizes, collection frequencies, opening hours, and whether they were listed on the Safe Sharps website. Prior to the audit, only twenty out of 114 council-managed disposal bins were listed on the Safe Sharps website/app. The audit identified an additional fourteen bin locations were required across the region at sites in Armidale (x2), Glen Innes, Gunnedah, Tamworth, Narrabri, Bellata, Boggabri, Wee Waa, Inverell, Warialda and Bingara, Uralla, and Walcha. Four additional bins were also provided to Tamworth Regional Council by Hunter New England Health to meet additional needs identified but not originally funded in the program.

REFERENCES

safesharps.org.au

‘Safe Collection and Disposal of Community Sharps’ training was delivered across the region. The training was provided at eight different locations with 120 council staff from operational and management roles attending.

Community Education Materials were also designed and distributed. This involved 2,000 stickers and 4,000 postcards (see figure 1) with details on what community sharps are, what to do if an inappropriately discarded sharp is found, the Needle Clean Up hotline, and how to find locations of bins using the Safe Sharps website/app, and other relevant information.

Outcomes

The participating councils recognise that appropriate infrastructure encourages proper disposal. This has led to reduced clean-up requirements and changed the unfounded belief that providing sharps disposal infrastructure encourages illegal drug use. The total number of bins managed by the councils in the NIRW region has also now risen to 128.

More accurate data on the cost and benefit of better service provision has enabled councils to actively extend infrastructure, improving health and safety outcomes for staff and community alike. Disposal infrastructure servicing records; including frequency of collections, volumes and annual collection and disposal contract costs; will help inform better decision making and service provision into the future.

Key Learnings

- Reporting of sharps clean-up and other related data can be absent or inconsistent.
- Regional based collection and disposal programs may produce better economies of scale.
- A whole of industry approach that includes producers and distributors of sharps as well as councils is needed to effectively address community sharps management disposal issues.
- Behavioural change programs need to consider the diversity of circumstances that require sharps use when targeting sharps users.

Contact

Name: Alison Leckie

Position: Program Coordinator

Phone: 02 6766 5680

Email: a.leckie@nirw.org.au

This project was the 2017 winner of the Community Sharps Management Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards