



NC Safer Syringe Initiative Annual Report, 2022-2023

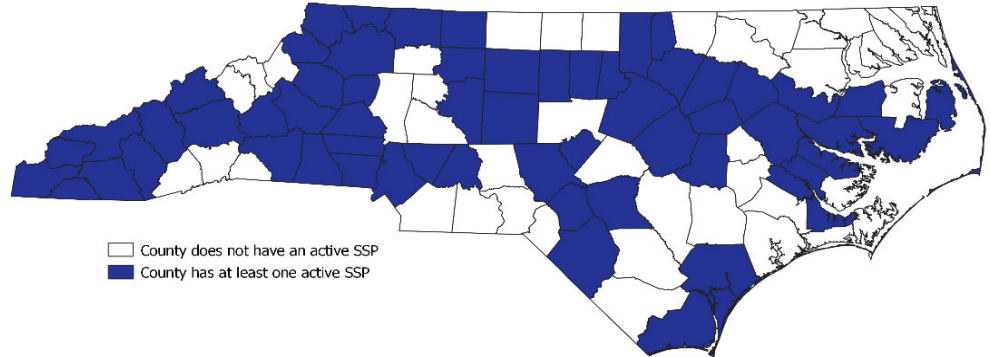
North Carolina law (G.S. 90-113.27) allows for the legal establishment of hypodermic syringe and needle exchange programs.¹ **Syringe services programs (SSPs) are an evidence-based strategy to reduce overdose deaths, reduce transmission of blood-borne pathogens including HIV and hepatitis C (HCV), and connect participants to treatment and care.** SSPs provide a variety of health and social services for people who use drugs, often serving as the primary avenue to meet their health needs or as an on-ramp to other care. They offer sterile syringes and disposal services to remove biohazards from the community and reduce sharing and reuse of syringes. They also provide wound care, distribute naloxone, and offer many wraparound services. This report summarizes data reported from **July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023** to the Division of Public Health (DPH) from all registered SSPs in North Carolina about their services.

¹ Visit <https://tinyurl.com/NCSSPLaw>

SSPs directly serve over half of all North Carolina counties.

There are **50** Syringe Services Programs that have filed security plans in **58** counties and **1** federally recognized tribe across NC.

Despite the increased coverage over time, there are many North Carolinians who still need access to syringe services programs, as evidenced by **entire pockets of the state still lacking any programs.**



The North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative aims to ensure that anyone in NC can access SSP services. While these programs do not entice people to start using drugs, they do connect people who already use drugs to critical health and social supports.

For a continuously updated list of registered SSPs, visit <https://tinyurl.com/NCSSList>

Of these 50 SSPs, **31** operate using a fixed-site location, **33** operate using mobile services, **25** operate using peer-based distribution, **25** operate in an integrated space, and **16** operate using delivery services. Note that many SSPs utilize more than one program model. For more information about program model types, visit <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/north-carolina-safer-syringe-initiative/syringe-exchange-models>.

SSPs are reaching more North Carolinians who use drugs.

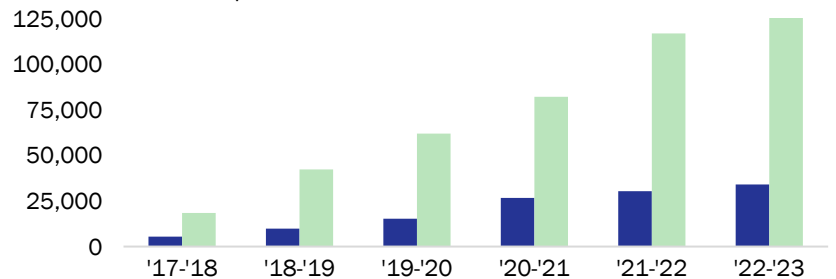


34,016 unique individuals were served across all programs in the 2022-2023 reporting year. This represents **an increase of 12%** since the last reporting year.

Individuals Served and Total Contacts* by SSPs



Programs had **126,797** total contacts* with participants in the 2022-2023 reporting year. This represents **an increase of 8%** from the previous year.



*A contact can be any interaction with a participant that provides connection to harm reduction or overdose prevention or referral services. A single participant can have multiple interactions/contacts.

Of the participants who reported demographic information (54%) in the 2022-2023 reporting year:

Individuals ages **35-44** made up the **highest percentage of SSP participants** (37%) followed by ages 25-34 (27%) and 45-54 (21%).

56% of the participants were male (including trans men) and **43%** of the participants were female (including trans women). The remainder of participants identified as non-binary or different identity. Across all gender identities, **79** participants identified as transgender.

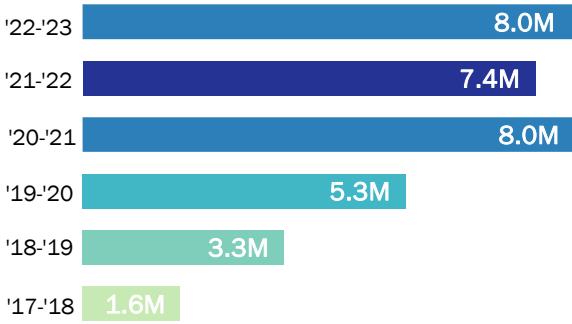
The **majority of SSP participants identified as white** (85%) followed by Black/African American (9%). 2% of participants were American Indian.

Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2023.

SSPs distribute supplies and make referrals that save lives.

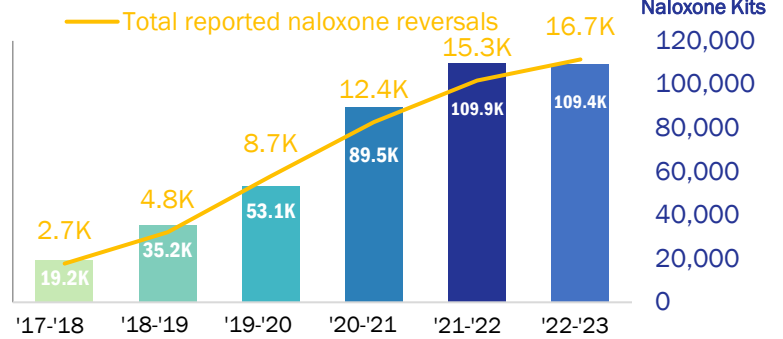
SSPs distributed **over 8.0 million** syringes in the 2022-2023 reporting year.

This is an **increase of over 8%** from the previous year.



SSPs distributed **109,351** naloxone kits in the 2022-2023 reporting year.

This is approximately the same amount as the previous year.



In addition to distributing sterile syringes and naloxone kits, this annual reporting year the **majority of SSPs** also provided participants with a wide variety of additional harm reduction and overdose prevention supplies including **fentanyl test strips, xylazine test strips, safer sex supplies, wound care supplies, other hygiene supplies, and sharps disposal containers** to safely dispose of used supplies.

A key purpose of SSPs is to provide participants with sterile syringes and facilitate safe disposal of syringes. SSP participants can also dispose of syringes in hard-wall containers as part of their household waste, as generally allowed by [state and local law](#). To prevent risk of infectious diseases, a new, sterile syringe is recommended for each use. Increases in the number of syringes distributed by a program highlight success in expanding sterile syringe access and reducing risk of infectious disease.

SSPs establish trust with their participants and regularly engage with frontline communities responding to drug overdoses. Naloxone distribution, to people who use drugs and to their friends and families has been shown to be an **extremely successful and cost-effective strategy to reduce overdose deaths**.

16,712

overdose reversals were reported to SSPs in 2022-2023.

16,712 reported overdose reversals is an **increase of over 10%** from the previous year. This number is also likely an underestimate of the total overdose reversals done by SSP participants, as many are not reported.

SSPs connect with people who are often disconnected from traditional health services.

Among those offering testing on-site this year:

24 SSPs administered 960 HIV tests
23 SSPs administered 1,000 HCV tests

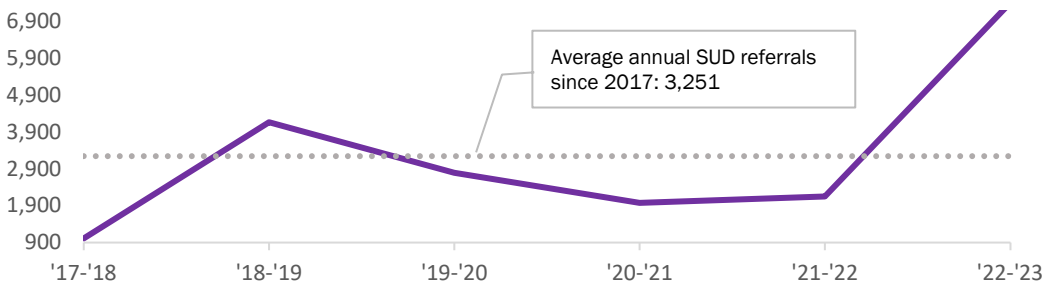
In 2022-2023, SSPs also made

5,505 referrals to HIV and HCV testing and treatment providers for participants.

Participants were referred to a wide variety of SUD treatment providers based on their unique needs.

SSPs made over **7,421 referrals** to substance use disorder (SUD) or mental health treatment in the 2022-2023 reporting year.

This is an **increase of over 246%** from the previous year.



Nearly **80%** of SSPs referred participants to detox, buprenorphine, inpatient and/or outpatient treatment providers for their SUDs.

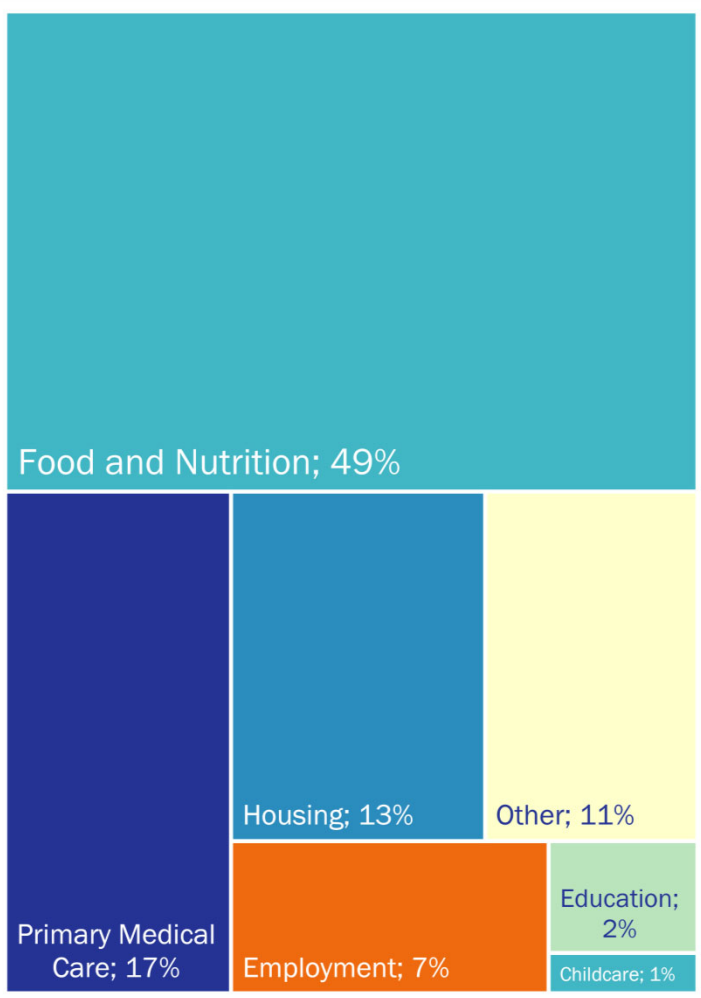
Additionally, SSPs referred participants to faith-based, methadone, and naltrexone treatment providers.

Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2023.

SSPs connect participants to more than just substance use-related services and supplies.

In 2022-2023, SSPs made over **8,500 referrals** to social determinants of health services including: **4,192** referrals to food and nutrition providers, 1,428 referrals to primary medical care, 1,119 referrals to housing, 610 referrals to employment, 210 referrals to education, and 76 referrals to childcare.

In the annual reporting form, SSPs were asked to write in the "other" types of referrals or direct services they provided participants. These included the following:



Note: an increase in font size corresponds to an increase in the number of SSPs providing that type of referral or direct support.

More than **50%** of all SSPs directly support participants with clothing, nutrition, transportation, and wound care needs.

Some SSPs also provide direct support for participants around hygiene, laundry, psychiatry, therapy, and vocational services.

DHHS Support of Syringe Services Programs

Supporting SSP infrastructure development is key to being able to meet the wide-ranging needs of all North Carolinians. While support for harm reduction and overdose prevention is increasing, SSPs often still operate with extremely limited budgets and work with a variety of funding restrictions that impact their ability to function. **Increasing access to SSPs and naloxone saves money and saves lives.**



Supply Purchase

DHHS continues to directly purchase supplies for SSPs to support linkages to care, including naloxone and wound care and personal hygiene supplies. Since 2020, DHHS has provided over 392,081 doses of naloxone directly to all registered SSPs across the state.



InjuryFree NC Academy on Harm Reduction as a Transformative Practice

This year, the Injury and Violence Prevention Branch hosted 8 in-person or virtual Harm Reduction Academy sessions for a total of 47 participants across the state. Sessions covered topics such as harm reduction 101, trauma-informed care, Housing First, sex worker-centered harm reduction, the history of the war on drugs, polysubstance use, drug checking, addressing stigma, centering lived experience, and conducting power analyses.



SSP Learning Collaborative

In collaboration with NC Harm Reduction Coalition and other SSPs across the state, DHHS brings together NC SSP leaders quarterly to share perspectives, build capacity and skills, and discuss ongoing work and program planning.



NC Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan SSP Advisory Group

DHHS convenes a group monthly to discuss issues and receive feedback from people who have lived experience of drug use and/or are directly impacted by the overdose crisis.

Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2023.



NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
 HUMAN SERVICES**
 Division of Public Health

Chronic Disease & Injury Section • Injury and Violence Prevention Branch •
<https://www.ncdhhs.gov/about/department-initiatives/overdose-epidemic> • NCDHHS is
 an equal opportunity employer and provider.

11/16/2023