

# NC Safer Syringe Initiative Annual Report, 2023-2024

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. "These programs play a vital role in public health, safety, and the provision of compassionate, person-centered care for people who use drugs and people with substance use disorders."<sup>1</sup> There are 50 Syringe Services Programs providing services in **62 counties and 1 federally recognized tribe** across North Carolina. SSPs in NC provided support to with nearly 32,000 people last year. This report summarizes data reported from **July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024** to the Division of Public Health (DPH) from all registered SSPs in NC about their services.

<sup>1</sup> [NCDHHS SSP Memo](#)

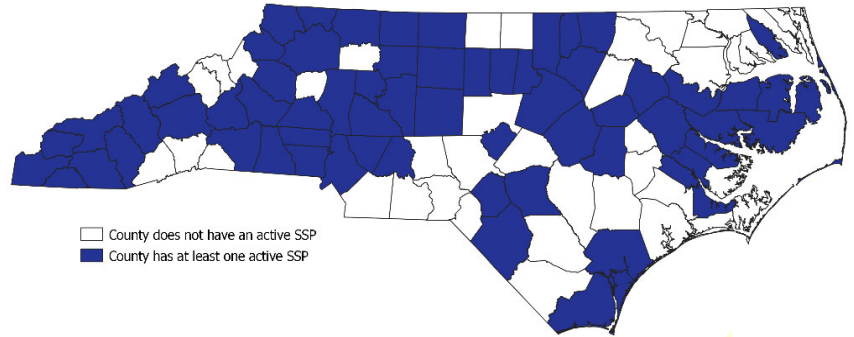
**The North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative aims to ensure that anyone in NC can access SSP services.**



**31,809** unique individuals were served across all programs in the 2023-2024 reporting year. This represents a decrease of 6% since the last reporting year.



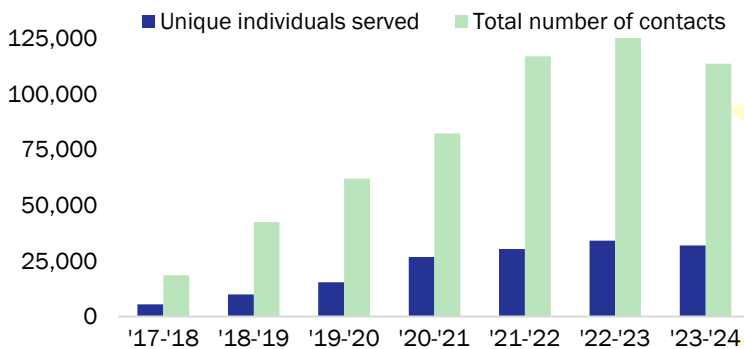
Programs had **113,688** total contacts\* with participants in the 2023-2024 reporting year. This represents a decrease of 10% from the previous year.



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

\*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.

## Individuals Served and Total Contacts\* by SSPs



Even with the increased coverage over time, there are many North Carolinians who still need access to syringe services programs, as evidenced by the participants from **25 additional counties and 5 states** traveling to access SSP services.

**Despite seeing disproportionate rates of overdose and overdose death in NC, historically marginalized populations are not accessing SSP services at disproportionate rates.**

SSPs are not required to collect information about participants' age, gender, or race. Sometimes, SSPs decide not to collect or report this information to enhance anonymity and increase participant trust. The following data represents participants from SSPs that collect and report demographic data.

Individuals age **35-44** made up the highest percentage of SSP participants (34%) followed by ages 25-34 (28%) and 45-54 (18%).

Nearly **40%** of participants did not report their gender. Of those who did report, 55% were male (including trans men) and 44% 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.

**34%** of participants did not report their race. Among the SSP participants who did, the majority identified as white (82%) followed by Black/African American (11%).

Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2024.

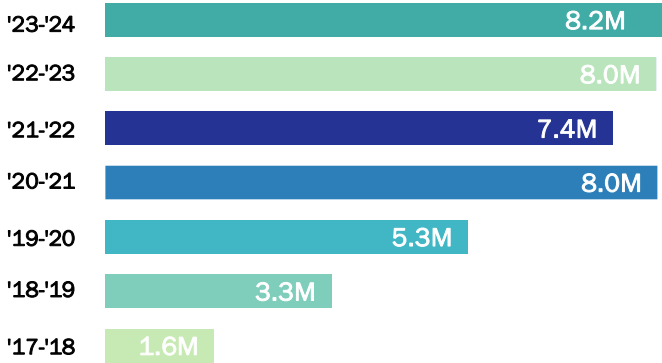
## SSPs distribute supplies and other resources that save lives.

A key purpose of SSPs is to provide participants with sterile syringes and other supplies that are used to mitigate risks associated with substance use while also facilitating the safe disposal<sup>2</sup> of these supplies.

<sup>2</sup>NCDEQ Safe Disposal Standards

### SSPs distributed over 8.2 million syringes in the 2023-2024 reporting year.

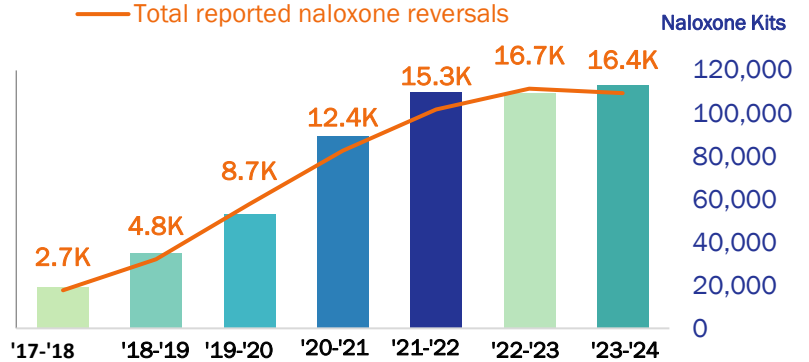
This is an increase of over 2% from the previous year.



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.

### SSPs distributed 113,189 naloxone kits in the 2023-2024 reporting year.

This is an increase of over 3% from the previous year.



# 16,411

overdose reversals were reported to SSPs in 2023-2024.

This is a decrease of 2% 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.

Among those offering testing on-site this year:

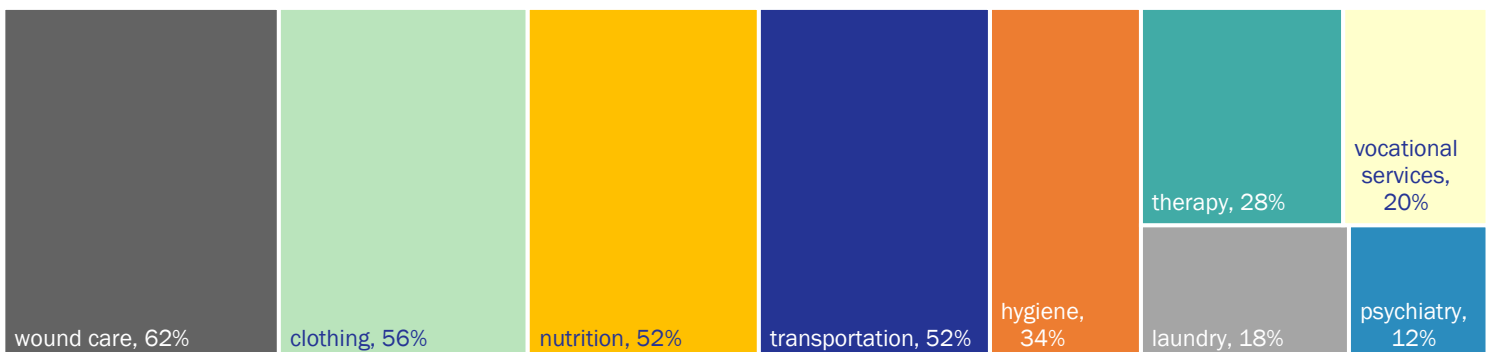
**23** SSPs administered **2,742** HIV tests  
**21** SSPs administered **2,623** HCV tests

In 2023-2024, SSPs also made

**4,733** referrals to HIV and HCV testing and treatment providers for participants.

## SSPs directly support participants with clothing, nutrition, transportation, wound care, and other important wraparound services.

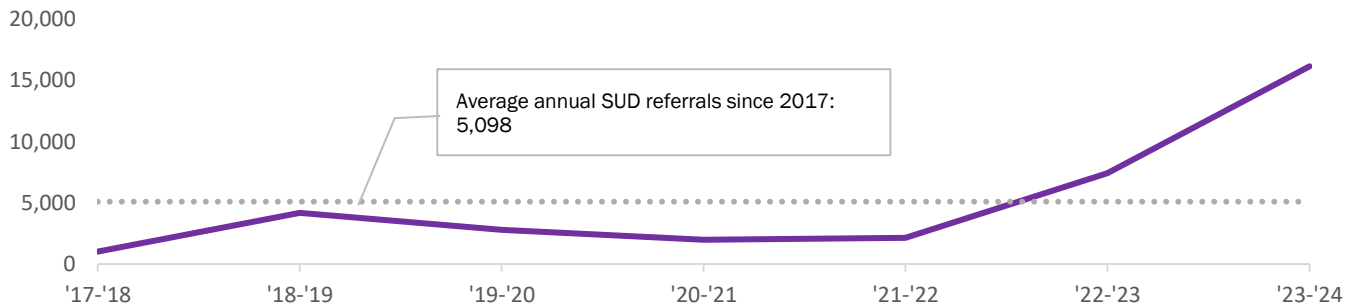
In the 2023-2024 reporting year, the following percent of SSPs provided these services directly to their participants:



Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2024.

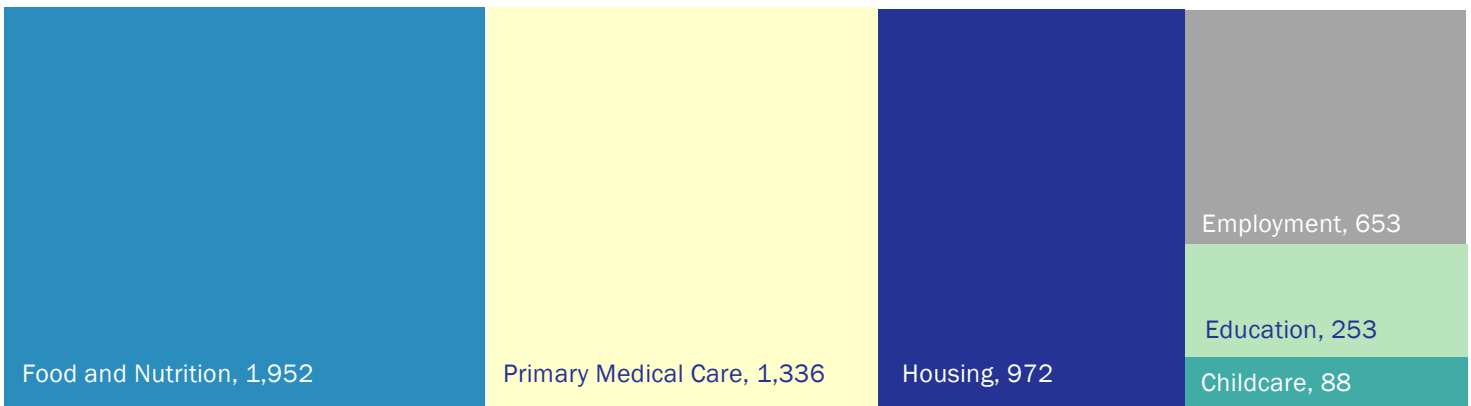
## SSPs connect with participants who are often disconnected from health services.

Statewide advocacy efforts for increased access to evidence-based treatment services helped SSPs make **over 16,176 referrals to substance use disorder (SUD) or mental health treatment** in the 2023-2024 reporting year. This is an **increase of over 653%\*** from the previous year.



\*referrals may include FAQ sheets about local treatment provider options and other services. Programs may interpret this metric differently which could have led to this large increase from the previous reporting year.

In 2023-2024, SSPs made **over 8,700 referrals** to services that support the personalized needs of participants including: food and nutrition providers, primary medical care, housing, employment, education, childcare and MUCH MORE!



Participants were referred to and connected with a variety of resources based on their personal needs.

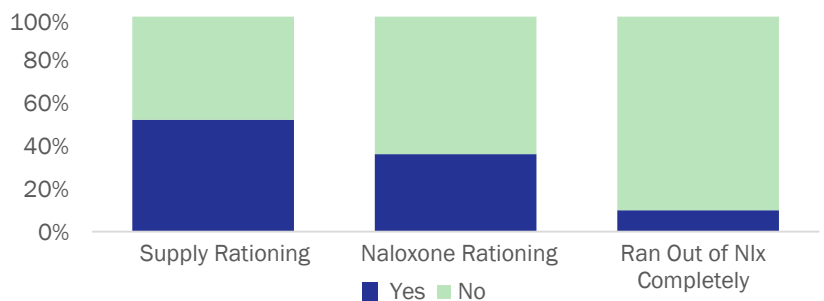
As this report demonstrates, Syringe Services Programs play a vital role in creating healthy and safe communities. While the demand for these programs continues to grow, **SSPs are facing continued challenges sustaining the immense amount of work that they do in their communities.**

**Sterile waters, syringes, and wound care kits** were the most commonly rationed supplies for SSPs this reporting year. Supplies rationed are shown in the word cloud below.

**Over half (56%)** of SSPs received funding from their county government in the 2023-2024 reporting year.

Four programs reported having **no funding at all** in the past year.

**Limited support and funding led to over half (52%)** of all SSPs rationing supplies in the 2023-2024 reporting year.



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. Grassroots, community-based SSPs face disparities in funding, and report running out of naloxone and harm reduction supplies or having to ration them more frequently than other program models. Increasing access to SSPs and naloxone saves money and saves lives.

Source: Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2024.

# Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Support of Syringe Services Programs

North Carolina law (G.S. 90-113.27) allows for the legal establishment of hypodermic syringe and needle exchange programs.<sup>3</sup> NCDHHS's support of syringe services programs remains in alignment with the legislative statutes supporting harm reduction and overdose prevention programming in NC.

<sup>3</sup>Visit <https://tinyurl.com/NCSSPLaw>



## Supply Purchase

NCDHHS continues to directly purchase supplies for SSPs to support linkages to care, including naloxone, wound care, and personal hygiene supplies. Since 2020, DHHS has provided over 440,000 doses of naloxone directly to all registered SSPs across the state.



## InjuryFreeNC Academy on Harm Reduction as a Transformative

**Practice** In collaboration with the UNC Injury Prevention Research Center, The Injury and Violence Prevention Branch hosted four days of virtual training and four days of in person training for people who work in the harm reduction and overdose prevention space. Training and educational sessions included topics like: Principles of Harm Reduction, Trauma-Informed Services, Drug Checking, Wound Care, Centering Lived Experience, Sex Work 101 and more.



## 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

This group meets every other month to discuss current trends and needs. The SSP Advisory Group informs and guides our work to ensure NCDHHS priorities align with the needs of the community.

**Source:** Annual Reporting Data, submitted by registered North Carolina Safer Syringe Initiative programs, as of September 2024.



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/departments/initiatives/overdose-epidemic> •  
NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

12/20/2024