Responding to Drug Related Litter in Dublin City Centre.

A pilot of providing sharps bins in public locations

1. Drug use in Dublin’s public spaces is a matter of significant concern to the general public. In 2005, the Lord Mayor’s Commission on Crime and Policing highlighted public perception of the problem of public injecting in Dublin:

   “…addicts injecting in public places…a sight [which] causes distress to members of the public who feel threatened by such overt drug abuse on the streets…and a perception of lawlessness often ensues”¹

2. Local stakeholders have consistently identified public drug use as a problem, with:

   “… over one in three respondents (36% of respondents) describing antisocial behavior particularly drink and drug related behavior, crime and safety issues) as being the worst thing about Dublin. There were over 400 mentions of drugs and drug use in the open responses. Many of the panel members feel that this has had a serious impact on the image of the city centre and is something that needs urgent attention from all stakeholders that operate in the city.”²

3. This general public sentiment is backed up with objective research with drug users. A 2005 study showed that 68% of 66 homeless intravenous drug users (IDUs) reported injecting in a public place in the past month³. A client survey carried out by Ana Liffey Drug Project in 2008 found that of the 16 respondents who reported where they had injected 30 days prior to interview, 9 (56%) reported using in public places⁴. More recently, Merchants Quay Ireland reported that 44 (14%) people who used the needle exchange service generally injected in public places⁵.

4. Public injecting is not only a concern to the general public, but also to the individual drug user. Long notes that at the end of 2009 there were 5,369 diagnosed HIV cases in Ireland, of which 1,447 (27%) were probably infected through injecting drug use; further, in 2009, 40% of newly

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⁵ Jennings, C. (2014). Re-establishing Contact: A profile of clients attending the Health Promotion Unit – Needle Exchange at Merchants Quay Ireland. Dublin: Merchants Quay Ireland
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reported hepatitis C cases had risk factor status recorded\textsuperscript{6}. The majority of these cases (70.9\%) reported injecting drug use as the main risk factor. The spread of blood borne viruses among injecting drug users occurs in part through unsafe injecting behaviours. A number of studies show elevated levels of risk behaviour among street injecting populations\textsuperscript{7}. In early 2015, there has been an increase in the number of new HIV cases diagnosed among people who inject drugs, and this increase may be related to injecting drug use among a public injecting cohort\textsuperscript{8}.

5. Given the impact that injecting drug use has on a range of stakeholders, it is important to implement evidence based policies to address it. One policy that has been implemented elsewhere is the use of sharps bins – sharps bins placed in areas where public injection is common into which drug users can deposit used syringes.

6. There can be barriers to safe disposal of used syringes. For example, drug users may fear being witnessed by police with used syringes and other paraphernalia\textsuperscript{9}. This can lead to drug equipment being left near or at the point of use. However, in some locations, the use of sharps bins has helped to mitigate problems of unsafe disposal. For example, in Melbourne, many retailers in the central business district expressed concern about drug use and the associated discarded syringes. Melbourne City Council responded to these concerns through a variety of strategies, including a six-month free trial of syringe bins for businesses during 2003–2004. The council commissioned an external evaluation of the trial, which found that syringe disposal bins are a useful option for facilitating appropriate syringe disposal; further, 11 of the 13 businesses which participated in the trial continued with the maintenance of the syringe disposal bins beyond the free trial period\textsuperscript{10}.

7. Similarly, a study of a sharps bin programme in Montreal suggested that injecting drug users changed their needle-disposal behaviour in response to increased safe disposal options, and

\textsuperscript{8} See, for example, http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/hse-sets-up-intervention-team-over-rise-in-hiv-cases-333521.html
\textsuperscript{9} See, for example, Burris, S. et al “Addressing the “Risk Environment” for Injection Drug Users: The Mysterious Case of the Missing Cop” Milbank Q. 2004 Mar; 82(1): 125–156.
\textsuperscript{10} Devaney M, Berends L. Syringe disposal bins: The outcomes of a free trial for city traders in an inner-city municipality Australia. Subst Use Misuse. 2008(43):139
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that in addition to being relatively low-threshold, economical and rapid, sharps bins appear to be a highly effective intervention to reduce discarded needles\(^{11}\).

8. In the UK, drug-related litter bins were evaluated in 2 UK settings, and included the views/experiences of 51 IDUs. Positive views were associated with discrete design / location, with negative views related to stigma and policing. The study concluded that bins should be spatially relevant to provide meaningful benefit\(^{12}\).

9. Closer to home, it is interesting to note that Cork City Council implemented a sharps bin solution in the city centre, which has been reported as being highly effective in reducing unsafe disposal in the area\(^{13}\).

10. As part of this pilot:
   a. purpose built, industrial standard, sharps bins have been placed discreetly in two separate locations i.e. one sharps bin in each location.
   b. the locations have been chosen as they are areas where public injecting of drugs has been identified locally as a significant problem.
   c. the location of the sharps bins will not be revealed - people who engage in the public injection of drugs in these locations will find the sharps bins easily and they will have the opportunity to safely dispose of their drug paraphernalia.
   d. the bins will be monitored daily and the pilot will be reviewed after 12 weeks.
   e. the following information is displayed prominently on the sharps bins:

   Need help with a drug or alcohol issue?

   Contact 1800 78 68 28 or visit drugs.ie

   In case of an emergency call 999

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\(^{13}\) http://www.rte.ie/news/2013/0703/460333-cork-needles/