

# The Sharp Truth: Exploring the Barriers to Implementing & Accessing Needle Exchange Programs in Canada

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# Background

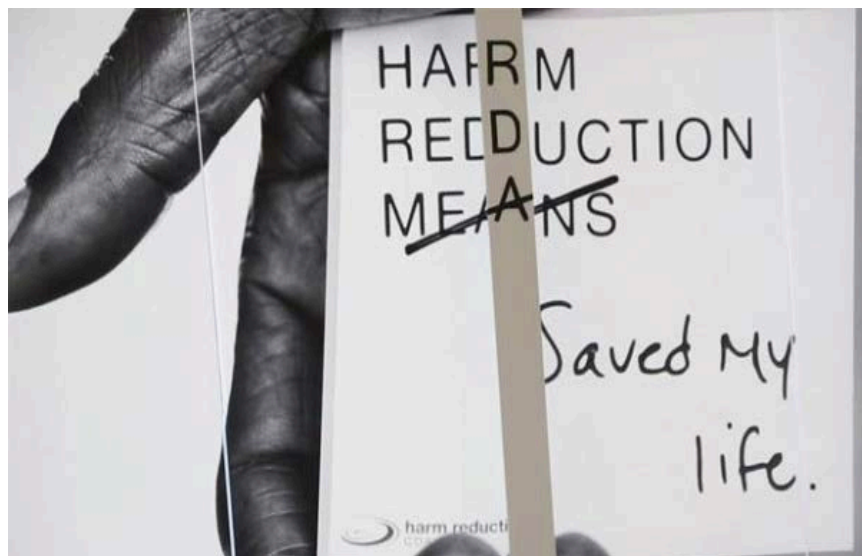
- Injection drug use is associated with significant health risks such as HIV & HCV infection<sup>1</sup>.
- As of 2011, over 100,000 people identified as people who inject drugs in Canada<sup>2</sup>
  - Represents 0.4% of total Canadian population, yet the HIV incidence rate was 431 per 100,000 people
  - People who inject drugs were **46 times** more likely to be infected with HIV than those who do not inject drugs

# Background (Con't)

- According to HCV Surveillance data<sup>3</sup>:
  - Approx. 1% of the total Canadian population were antibody positive for HCV
  - Within that 1%, people who inject drugs represented 42.6% of all antibody cases
- Treatment
  - HIV: \$257,984 CAD per case over a lifetime<sup>4</sup>
    - \$768,120,000 CAD annual cost in 2011
  - HCV:
    - \$13,737 CAD per case over a lifetime<sup>5</sup>

# What is Harm Reduction?

Policies and programs aimed at reducing the physical, social, and economic harms associated with the use of illegal substances<sup>6</sup>.



[http://res.cloudinary.com/netizn/image/fetch/f\\_jpg,q\\_95,w\\_620,c\\_pad/http://idpc.net/uploads/image/2016/01/Harm\\_Reduction\\_International\\_pic.jpg](http://res.cloudinary.com/netizn/image/fetch/f_jpg,q_95,w_620,c_pad/http://idpc.net/uploads/image/2016/01/Harm_Reduction_International_pic.jpg)



<http://www.substance.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Harm-reduction-police.jpg>

# Needle Exchange Programs (NEPs)

- Harm reduction intervention that operates under the idea that providing sterile needles reduces the transmission of blood borne pathogens<sup>7</sup>.
- **Services:**
  - Needle distribution
  - Safe disposal of used needles
  - Information on safer substance use
  - Referrals
  - Condoms and safer sex materials
- **Free and confidential**

# Needle Exchange (Con't)

Past research has found NEPs to be:

- Effective in substantially reducing HIV & HCV transmission<sup>8</sup>
- Associated with the decline in needle sharing behaviors<sup>9,10</sup>
- Cost effective<sup>7</sup>
- A bridge of contact between people who inject drugs and health care providers<sup>7</sup>



[http://blog.nj.com/ledgerupdates\\_impact/2009/04/large\\_needle-exchange-newark2.JPG](http://blog.nj.com/ledgerupdates_impact/2009/04/large_needle-exchange-newark2.JPG)

<http://www.gannett-cdn.com/-mm-/1060982b3b3cf91c6f01ca1b6b99c573a92f0a0d/c=109-0-1882-1333&r=x404&c=534x401/local/-/media/2015/03/10/USATODAY/USATODAY/635616099856237315-needle->

# Research Questions

1. What are the barriers associated with implementing and accessing needle exchange programs in Canada?
1. What impact do these barriers have on people who inject drugs?

# Methods: Literature Review

- Qualitative Meta- Synthesis: Identify, analyze and interpret pre – existing literature.
- Inclusion Criteria:
  - Published from 2000 – 2014
  - Canadian
  - Qualitative & Mixed methods
  - Primary & Secondary research
  - Program evaluations



# Methods (Con't)

## Database & Journal Search ( N = 148)

- MEDLINE ProQuest Nursing & Applied Health Source, Scencedirect, PUBMED, Web of Science,

## Abstract Review ( N = 88)

- Inclusion Criteria

## Thematic Review

- Levels of Analysis: Macro, Meso, Micro

# Key Findings – Thematic Review

## Philosophical Debate (Macro)

- Criminal Drug & Paraphernalia laws
- Relationships with Law Enforcement
- Funding

## Program Design (Meso)

- Hours of Operation
- Location
- Equipment & Services Provided

## Individual (Micro)

- Community Resistance & Interference
- Stigma
- Privacy Concerns

# Macro Level Barriers

Political, economic, and social contexts that influence health on meso and micro levels<sup>11</sup>

- Criminal Drug & Paraphernalia laws
- Relationships with Law Enforcement
- Funding



<http://www.teachers-resources.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Canadian-law-300x198.jpg>



<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/supreme-court-sentencing-mandatory-minimums-1.3537150>

# Meso Level Barriers

- Link macro elements with elements that influence health on a micro level<sup>11</sup>
  - Hours of Operation
  - Location
  - Equipment & Services Provided



[http://www.nlar.ca/cms\\_content/files/images/resize/open-closed.png](http://www.nlar.ca/cms_content/files/images/resize/open-closed.png)

# Micro Level Barriers

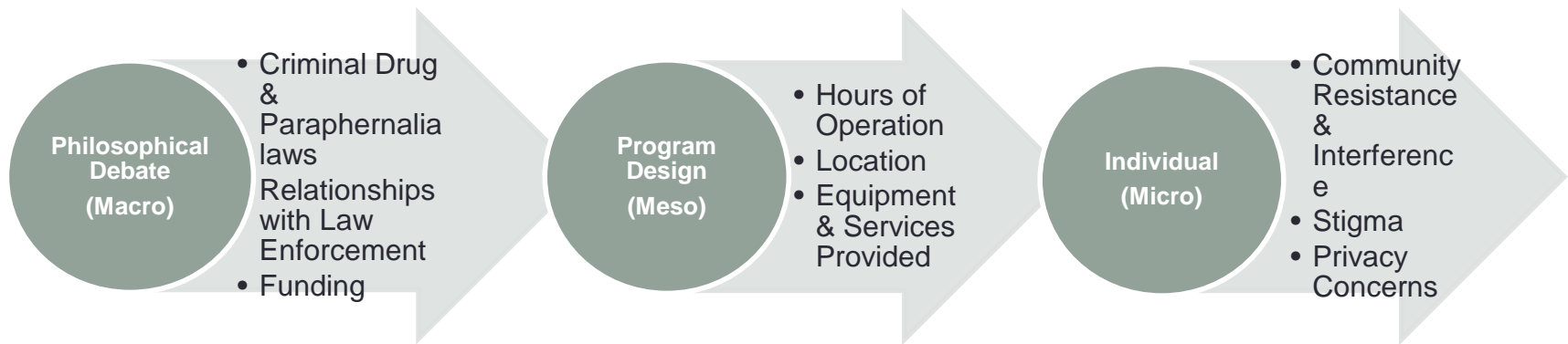
- Involves the immediate social and physical context in which interactions among individuals and small groups take place<sup>11</sup>
  - Stigma
  - Community Resistance & Interference
  - Privacy Concerns



[http://www.talkingdrugs.org/sites/default/files/styles/columns-three/public/images/stigma\\_0.jpg?itok=OZnrm9Ay](http://www.talkingdrugs.org/sites/default/files/styles/columns-three/public/images/stigma_0.jpg?itok=OZnrm9Ay)

# Summary

- Governmental laws cast a shadow of criminality over participation in NEPs
- Law enforcement strategies impede access
- Logistical issues such as hours of operation and location can discourage participation in NEPs

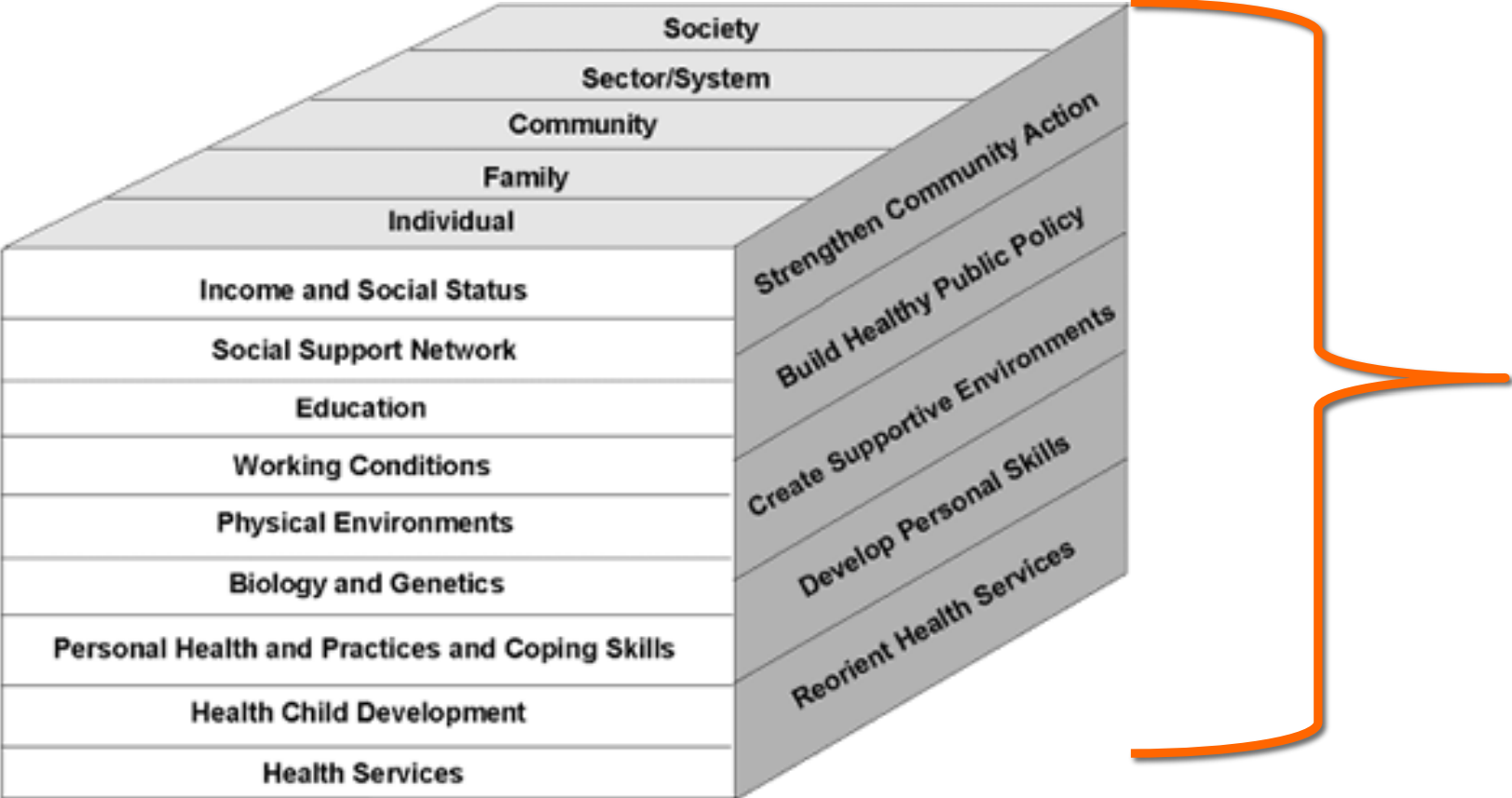


**WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

# Recommendations

- Prohibitionist policies must be eliminated
- Law enforcement should ensure strategies do not interfere with harm reduction policies
- NEPs should be designed with the primary goal of maximizing access. Must compliment users' convenience and comfort level
- Health promotion campaigns should be created to educate and reduce false perceptions and stigma associated with drug use
- Greater involvement of people who inject drugs in the program planning and design.

# PHAC's Population Health Promotion Model





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# Questions?

Thank you for your time!

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