

Exchange Works – Staff Safety

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Introduction

Inequities in access to health care are prevalent for people who use substances and these inequities are heightened by structural and social determinants of health. Harm reduction emphasizes human rights and the importance of treating all people with respect, dignity and compassion-regardless of substance use. Harm reduction is a non-judgmental approach that accepts a person’s right to make choices about their health and lives. It focuses on promoting safety and does not require that substance use be discontinued¹.

Purpose

All individuals or families accessing health unit or community programs may be living with stressful circumstances and this is no different for clients of the needle exchange program. Stress may result in an overtaxing of regular coping abilities. At times behavior may be unpredictable, verbal or physical aggression may be exhibited. Staff need to be aware of and be prepared to manage unpredictable behavior in ways that ensure their safety and the safety of their clients.

Policy

Addressing the personal safety concerns of staff, volunteers, students as well as the clients using the needle exchange services takes precedence over any other consideration or activity.

Procedures

In order to protect the safety of the staff, volunteers and others accessing services, the following safety precautions are to be observed at all times:

1. Preferably needle exchange activities will not occur in isolation. Staff will strive to ensure that they are not alone at the site when conducting exchanges. This may not always be feasible in Branch Offices when Program Assistants are working alone or in community organizations where staff work independently.
2. Volunteers and placement students will always be paired with a staff member.
3. Staff will maintain an awareness of and implement non-violent crisis intervention ([..\14 Appendices\Assessing Violence in the Community OSACH.pdf](#)) to enable them to assist clients during a crisis.

4. Any behaviour by a client that puts staff at risk will not be tolerated.
5. Clients will be asked to leave or barred from receiving services if their behaviour and conduct is unacceptable.
6. The decision to terminate an exchange, based on a client's behaviour, is at the discretion of the staff. Termination of service may be temporary or permanent. The client may ask to appeal the process and change their behaviour.
7. In the event of any behavioral incident, staff are to report any problems to their immediate supervisor and to the Program Manager at the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. [Use the Incident Form](#) to record details of the situation.
8. Staff, volunteers and students will remove themselves from any situation where they perceive their personal safety is at risk. If necessary call 911 for assistance.
9. After a crisis situation, staff involved will be provided an opportunity to debrief with their immediate supervisor or the Program Manager at the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, as necessary.

Related Policies

EW – Staff Training and Anonymity
EW - Key Messages and Education
EW – Media Inquiries
EW – Needle Stick Injuries
EW – Provision and Return of Supplies
EW – Documentation

Related Forms

Related Forms

[Incident Form](#) needs link

Final Approval Signature: _____

Review/Revision History:

2006.07.18; 2007.07.07

2009.08.13, 2010.08.18, 2016 09 14 References

Canadian Nurses Association (2018) Joint position statement, Harm Reduction and Substance use; retrieved from https://www.cna-aiic.ca/-/media/cna/page-content/pdf-en/joint_position_statement_harm_reduction_and_substance_use.pdf