

NSW Health

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NSW Community Sharps Guidance

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The NSW Ministry for Health acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands across NSW. We acknowledge that we live and work on Aboriginal lands. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and to all Aboriginal people.

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Background

01

Background

Community sharps are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare, body modification and recreational drug use. This includes used needles, syringes used for self-injecting purposes at a private residence or public place and lancets and other finger prickers.

Well managed community sharps where people have reasonable access to safe disposal facilities can contribute to the health and safety of communities and prevent the transmission of blood borne viruses and other needle stick injuries.

The inappropriate management and disposal of community sharps may pose a health and safety risk to the public, council employees, waste contractors and resource recovery operators. While the risk of blood borne virus transmission, including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B or hepatitis C is very low, any needle stick injury can potentially expose a risk.

1.1 About this document

Councils, Local Health Districts, government, non-government organisations, businesses and the community (hereby referred to as stakeholders) all have a role in providing an effective disposal infrastructure and ensuring the safe disposal of sharps. This document outlines a collaborative approach to effectively manage community sharps and create sustainable environments.

This document provides information to assist stakeholders to:

- Understand the legal and policy framework for community sharps management
- Understand the different roles and responsibilities for stakeholders in the management of community sharps
- Develop local partnerships to collaborate in community sharps management

1.2. Key definitions

Clinical waste	Waste resulting from medical, nursing, dental, pharmaceutical, skin penetration or other related clinical activity that has the potential to cause injury, infection or offense. It can include waste containing human tissue, body fluids or blood, blood-stained materials or equipment, laboratory specimens and animal tissue.
Community sharps	Sharps that are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare or recreation. This includes needles, syringes, lancets and finger prickers used at private residences and in public places that are not placed in a designated sharps container provided by a business, commercial or community service.
Harm reduction	Harm reduction aims to reduce the negative consequences associated with alcohol and other drug use. Examples of harm reduction include needle and syringe programs, drug treatment programs and opioid substitution programs.
Needle and Syringe Program outlets	Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) outlets include a range of services and programs which provide people who inject drugs with access to sterile injecting equipment, sharps disposal and other harm reduction services. By providing sterile injecting equipment, the NSP reduces the spread of blood borne viruses and injecting related harms, ultimately reducing the community prevalence of transmissible infections.
Sharps container	A container that complies with Australian standards most commonly used in medical settings. Sharps containers in the community can include rigid puncture proof containers often found in households, such as a strong plastic container with a screw top cap.
Sharps waste	Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 (NSW), sharps waste is defined as any waste collected from designated sharps waste containers used in the course of business, commercial or community service activities. This includes any waste resulting from the use of sharps for any of the following purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • human health care by health professionals or health care providers (either at health facilities or at home) • medical research or work on cadavers • veterinary care or veterinary research • skin penetration or the injection of drugs or other substances for medical or non-medical reasons.

1.3. Legal and legislative framework

Legislation relevant in conjunction with this Document

[Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997](#)

[Protection of the Environment Operations \(Waste\) Regulation 2014](#)

[The Local Government Act 1993](#)

[Public Health Regulation 2022](#)

[NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)

Who generates community sharps?

02

What are community sharps?

Community sharps are generated by community members through self-administered healthcare, body modification and recreational drug use. Despite this, people who inject drugs are often perceived as the main source of unsafe or inappropriate disposal of sharps. However, there are many people living with medical conditions that involve regular self-injection in the home.

Community sharps can be generated from:

- People who inject drugs including performance and image enhancing drugs.
- People managing medical conditions that involve self-injection or finger pricking in the home.
- Livestock and household pets that require vaccinations and medical treatments.
- People participating in skin penetration activities including home tattooing and cosmetic procedures.

2.1. What are the barriers to safe disposal?

People who generate sharps for healthcare or recreational drug use confirm that there are multiple barriers to disposing sharps, such as:

- Lack of publicly available information about safe sharps disposal or how to access local disposal services.
- Issues with disposal facilities including limited opening hours, lack of availability and access including parking and privacy concerns.
- Stigma and discrimination faced by people who inject drugs and others who use sharps for medical conditions, especially when attending disposal locations.

Management of community sharps

03

Who generates community sharps?

Community sharps are generated by a range of community groups in several locations including:

3.1 Residential property

People who inject drugs or have medical conditions that involve self-injection, finger pricking or the insertion of other medical devices in the home generate community sharps. Council and Local Health District staff are not allowed by law to enter onto private property without the invitation of the resident or landowner and a risk assessment conducted.

3.2 Social housing

People living in social housing may also require self-injection, finger pricking or the insertion of other medical devices in the home. The Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for the installation of community sharps bins and sharps discarded on social housing common property.

3.3 Public places

Used needles and syringes are occasionally found in public spaces such as parks and on footpaths. The NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline (1800 633 353) coordinates responses to community concerns regarding inappropriately disposed sharps in public places.

3.4 Businesses

Community sharps may be generated in commercial premises. This includes businesses offering services like:

- Acupuncture
- Beauty treatments
- Body, nose and ear piercing
- Cosmetic enhancements
- Colonic lavage
- Tattooing
- Blood cholesterol and glucose measurement
- And other procedures involving penetration of the skin

Businesses that generate sharps are responsible for ensuring they are disposed of appropriately.

3.5 Education centers and workplaces

People attending daycare centers, preschools, schools, technical and further education (TAFE), university and workplaces may also generate sharps. These centers are responsible for ensuring sharps are disposed of appropriately.

3.6 Transport for NSW owned land

Transport for NSW has guidelines for staff and contractors managing sharps that have been inappropriately discarded on roads and land managed by Transport for NSW.

3.7 Pharmacies

Pharmacies that participate in the Needle and Syringe Program and/or provide medical sharps are responsible for managing community sharps on their premises.

Roles and responsibilities

04

Who is responsible?

The management of community sharps is a shared responsibility across multiple stakeholders.

4.1 Councils

Councils are responsible for managing community sharps waste and sharps litter. Councils will determine the range of services required to safely and effectively manage in their area.

Councils are also responsible for the potential workplace and public health risks resulting from inappropriately discarded community sharps litter on public places and council owned or managed properties.

Council should manage community sharps by:

- Coordinating community sharps litter retrieval.
- Ensuring there are appropriate disposal bins in community areas including public parks, public bathrooms and carparks.
- Ensuring there is a range of disposal bin sizes in a range of community settings. Bins should also be large enough to accept Fitpacks and other packaging types in public bathrooms.
- Contracting authorised waste disposal services to regularly empty disposal bins in community areas including parks and public bathrooms.
- Displaying local council contact details for community members to report full, faulty or damaged disposal bins.
- Providing information on disposal bins detailing alternative disposal sites in case a disposal bin is full.
- Providing training opportunities for all council workers in the handling and disposing of sharps.
- Managing and regularly updating a community sharps webpage on a council website detailing where disposal sites are available.
- Collecting data on sharps disposed of on council managed land.
- Working with Local Health Districts where necessary to develop enhanced community sharps management plans in response to local concerns.

4.2 Local Health Districts

Local Health Districts must support councils in the safe disposal of community sharps by:

- Providing information on appropriate disposal practices to patients and clients who are generating sharps in their home environment.
- Providing information, education and training to community members, workers and non-government organisations on the management and disposal of community sharps.
- Providing community sharps disposal services for people who inject drugs at needle and syringe programs, public hospitals, community health centres and other health facilities.
- Contracting authorised waste disposal services to regularly empty disposal bins at needle and syringe programs, public hospitals and community health centres.
- Responding to NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline calls and responding as necessary.
- Providing advice and support to councils and other land holders to manage community sharps that are inappropriately disposed of in public places.
- Collecting data on clean ups and monitoring areas with high levels of sharps.
- Supporting councils to enhance local sharps management plans.

4.3 NSW Ministry of Health

The NSW Ministry of Health has demonstrated commitment to the management of community sharps by:

- Providing community sharps disposal equipment and facilities for people who inject drugs through the NSW Needle and Syringe Program and participating pharmacy sites.
- Supporting the NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline to coordinate responses to community concerns regarding inappropriately disposed needles and syringes in public places.

- Facilitating access to sharps containers for councils at the state contract price.
- Managing the NSW Health community sharps webpage.

4.4 Diabetes Australia

Diabetes Australia promotes safe disposal of sharps and educates people with diabetes on the importance of correct disposal. Diabetes Australia also:

- Conducts an annual survey of sharps disposal practices for people living with diabetes in NSW.
- Provides safe sharps information including education on appropriate alternatives for community sharps disposal containers.
- Sells personal use sharps containers.

4.5 Local Businesses

Local businesses, including veterinary clinics, pharmacies, skin penetration premises, hair salons and other cosmetic clinics are responsible for disposing of their own sharps through appropriate commercial waste contractors.

Local businesses are not to dispose of sharps produced within the business in community sharps bins. Commercial premises that generate sharps are responsible for ensuring they are disposed of appropriately. This includes having an agreement in place with a waste disposal contractor for the regular disposal of sharps.

4.6 Pharmacies participating in the Needle and Syringe Program

Many pharmacies provide Fitpacks as part of the NSW Needle and Syringe Program. Pharmacies providing this service provide sharps bins for clients to dispose of their used Fitpacks. Pharmacies can also sell personal use sharps containers to all members of the public. Some pharmacies may also partner with local councils to collect and dispose of community sharps waste.

4.7 Community, Residents and Owners Corporations

Members of the community who use injecting equipment have a responsibility to dispose of their sharps safely. Community members can speak to healthcare providers about the correct method to dispose of their sharps.

Community members can also utilise the NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline to report inappropriately discarded needles and syringes.

Community members may also seek training and information from health services about disposing community sharps appropriately.

Residents and Owners Corporations are responsible for managing community sharps waste and sharps litter on their properties.

Managing community sharps

05

How are community sharps managed?

It is important to manage community sharps effectively to prevent accidental injury or the re-use of inappropriately discarded community sharps.

Stakeholders should contribute to this by:

- Reducing the number of community sharps present in public places by providing adequate disposal options in various locations
- Ensuring employees and contractors have appropriate knowledge, training and equipment to safely undertake their workplace activities, including partaking in sharps clean-up exercises
- Raising community awareness on safe sharps disposal, responsibilities and available services
- Encourage appropriate disposal and reduce community stigma through appropriately addressing conversations around risk in public discourse and the media

5.1. Public hospitals and authorised Needle and Syringe Program outlets

All public hospitals and facilities that are authorised Needle and Syringe Program outlets must accept used sharps from community members at no cost, regardless of whether the person is a Needle and Syringe Program client.

Needle and Syringe Programs must ensure that clients and other community members returning used injecting equipment to a Needle and Syringe Program outlet are provided with relevant information about the local disposal facilities.

Needle and Syringe Programs are to refer businesses or community members who want to dispose of commercial waste to a commercial waste contractor.

5.2. Community sharps management plan

All stakeholders listed under section 4.0 are encouraged to create a community sharps management plan. A structured plan can identify ways to discourage community sharps being disposed of in household bins and manage community sharps that are inappropriately disposed of in public places.

A community sharps management plan can identify ways to:

- Outline a plan to manage community sharps that are inappropriately disposed of in public places.
- Encourage staff and volunteers to be trained to regularly perform community clean ups in public places.
- Encourage the use of community sharps disposal bins through promotion and education.
- Discourage community sharps being disposed of inappropriately in household bins through promotion and education.
- Promote the [NSW Environment Protection Authority](#) definition of sharps waste.

A community sharps management plan can include:

- Standard operating procedure for responding to community sharps
- Response triage and referral pathways
- Safe work method statement
- Risk management plan
- Work health and safety considerations
- Personal protective equipment procedures
- Roles and responsibilities
- Needlestick injury management
- Access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Training schedules, partner contacts and resources.

5.3. Education and training

The community

Providing education to the community involved in the management of community sharps is essential. Types of education to the community may include:

- Publishing the location of community sharps bins and other sharp disposal services.
- Providing information about community sharps bins on websites including council, Local Health District and non-government organisation websites involved in the delivery of the Needle and Syringe Program.
- Advising the community about how to report inappropriately discarded sharps through the NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline.
- Promoting the NSW Needle Clean Up Hotline number 1800 633 353 and local council information on sharps disposals.
- Pharmacies, hospitals and chemists providing education about safe sharps disposal when supplying injecting equipment and medical sharps to customers.

Workers

All NSW Health workers may be trained in the disposal and management of community sharps.

Providing training to all workers involved in the management of community sharps is essential. Additionally, when workers are involved in the collection of used injecting equipment, they must adhere to NSW Health Policy Directive Infection Prevention and Control in Healthcare Settings ([PD2023_025](#)).

It is recommended that the following be incorporated into education and training plans:

- Never place hands into any hidden area (e.g. drains, cavities or garbage bags)
- Do not attempt to recap, break or bend needles
- Use a sharps container for collection of used injecting equipment
- Ensure no one is standing nearby when collecting used injecting equipment to avoid accidental injury

- Place the sharps container on the ground beside the used injecting equipment to be collected and pick up the piece of equipment using appropriate equipment (e.g. tongs)
- Place the used injecting equipment in the sharps container sharp end first
- Place used disposable gloves in a waste container
- Wash hands with water and soap. If tongs or other collection equipment have been used, clean these items with detergent and warm water. Then treat with a suitable disinfectant solution and air dry.
- Workers can also be educated about the benefits of the Needle and Syringe Program and how it is operationalised by referring to the NSW Health Guideline NSW Needle and Syringe Program ([GL2023_002](#)). Workers are also encouraged to complete training and education in reducing stigma and discrimination faced by people who inject drugs.

5.4. Monitoring

Monitoring how community sharps are being managed is recommended to ensure the community needs are being met. Councils can monitor community sharps by:

- Checking the community sharps bins for usage and determining if more regular waste disposals are required or additional bins installed
- Identifying local hotspots and performing regular needle and syringe sweeps of public areas under council management
- Recording incidents and complaints in a central database for reporting purposes

Partnerships

06

Stakeholder collaboration

Activities which generate sharps in the community are increasing, both in personal and commercial contexts.

Councils can partner with stakeholders to improve their community amenities and maintain safe environments for customers and staff.

Partnering with stakeholders can have benefits including:

- Providing a community sharps disposal service to community members
- Demonstrating community support and environmental responsibility
- Helping businesses meet workplace health and safety responsibilities
- Reducing stigma associated with chronic disease management and other injecting/skin penetration behaviours

Key stakeholders that Council can engage to work collaboratively with:

- Local Health Districts including hospital cleaning services and Needle and Syringe Program outlets
- Non-government organisations including Diabetes Australia and the NSW Users and AIDS Association
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
- People living with diabetes and other medical conditions requiring self-injection
- People who inject drugs
- Local business, including tattoo parlors and cosmetic clinics, to ensure they are meeting their sharps waste disposal obligations
- Pharmacies including members of any Council Pharmacy community sharps program
- Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

