

## Needle exchanges reduce disease rates

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Recent letter writer Dina Kotler's interest in harm reduction is commendable, but her research may not have led her to reliable or up-to-date information (Harm reduction only makes problems worse, Feb. 2 edition of The Daily Courier).

Scientific research recognized by the World Health Organization shows that harm reduction is an effective public health measure and that needle exchange programs reduce HIV and hepatitis C infection rates without increasing crime or encouraging drug use.

Kotler also notes that Insite, Vancouver's safe injection site, has a capacity far below what is needed to serve the thousands of drug users in the Downtown Eastside. But Insite was established two years ago as a pilot project - it was never intended to serve the area's entire population of drug users. Evidence shows that the facility has reduced public drug use and public needle disposal, lowered HIV and hepatitis C infection rates, reduced the number of overdoses, and redirected drug addicts into treatment programs. Its success is leading other cities, including Victoria and Toronto, to consider setting up similar facilities.

I hope to see increased support for harm reduction programs as people become better informed of the solid evidence supporting them.

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