

More Kentucky adults favor than oppose needle exchange programs

Needle exchange programs, also known as syringe exchange programs, provide people with access to sterile syringes and often provide other sterile injection equipment, referrals to treatment services, testing and vaccinations. There are currently more than 50 such programs operating in Kentucky.¹ These programs are effective at preventing the spread of diseases such as HIV.² However, these programs are the subject of political debate in Kentucky.

A 2018 study led by researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health found that about 4 in 10 adults in the United States (39%) support legalizing syringe exchange programs in their communities.³ Better understanding public opinion can help communities gauge

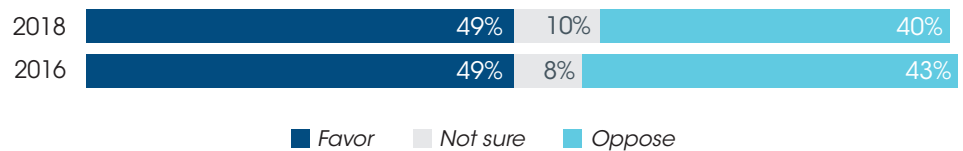
¹ Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services: Department for Public Health. (2017) HIV Prevention Program. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2UICZ7>.

² Aspinall, E.J., Nambiar, D., Goldberg, D.J., Hickman, M., Weir, A., Van Velzen, E., Palmateer, N., Doyle, J.S., Hellard, M.E., Hutchinson, S.J. (2014). Are needle and syringe programmes associated with a reduction in HIV transmission among people who inject drugs: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Int J Epidemiology* 43(1): 235-48.

³ McGinty, E.E., Barry, C.L., Stone, E.M., Niederdeppe, J., Kennedy-Hendricks, A., Linden, S., & Sherman, S. (2018). Public support for safe consumption sites and syringe services programs to combat the opioid epidemic. *Preventive Medicine* 111: 73-77.

Do you favor or oppose needle exchange programs?

(Percentages may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.)



SOURCE: 2018 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (released March 2019)



local support before developing a needle exchange program.

The **Kentucky Health Issues Poll (KHIP)**, which is sponsored by Interact for Health and the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky, asked Kentucky adults about their familiarity with and opinions regarding needle exchange programs.

More than half familiar with needle exchange programs

KHIP asked Kentucky adults, "How familiar are you with needle exchange programs which have been implemented in a number of cities across the Commonwealth?"⁴ More than 5 in

⁴ KHIP asked, "First, I'd like to ask you about needle exchange programs offering clean needles to IV drug users in exchange for used needles. How familiar are you with needle exchange programs which have been implemented in a number of cities across the Commonwealth...?"

10 Kentucky adults (54%) reported being familiar with such programs. This is higher than the more than 4 in 10 Kentucky adults (45%) who said they were not familiar with needle exchanges. Similar results were found when KHIP asked the question in 2016.

More adults favor rather than oppose needle exchange programs

KHIP also asked, "Do you favor or oppose needle exchange programs?"⁵ About half of Kentucky adults (49%) said that they favor needle exchange

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⁵ KHIP asked, "Some people favor needle exchange programs because they feel these programs help reduce the spread of AIDS. Others oppose needle exchange programs because they feel these programs send the message that it's okay to use illegal drugs. What about you... do you favor or oppose needle exchange programs?"

programs. That compares with 4 in 10 Kentucky adults who said that they oppose them (40%). About 1 in 10 said they were not sure (10%). This is similar to when the question was asked in 2016. (See graph on first page).

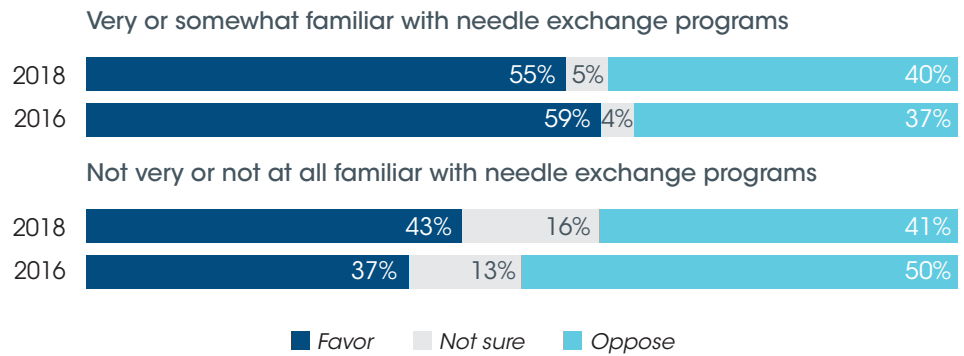
Support varies by age, education, type of community

Opinions about needle exchanges varied by age, education level and the type of community in which adults live. Kentucky adults ages 18 to 29 (57%) were more likely than those older than 65 (39%) to favor needle exchange programs. About 5 in 10 adults ages 30 to 64 favored such programs (51%).

Support for needle exchange programs increased with education levels. Kentucky adults with a college degree (65%) were more likely to favor such programs than those with a high school diploma (42%) or less (31%).

Kentucky adults who live in urban areas (59%) were more likely than

Percentage of Kentucky adults who favor or oppose needle exchange programs, by familiarity



SOURCE: 2018 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (released March 2019)



residents of suburban (49%) or rural communities (42%) to favor needle exchange programs.

Kentucky adults familiar with needle exchange programs more likely to favor them

More than 5 in 10 adults who were very or somewhat familiar with needle exchange programs favored them (55%). Four in 10 were opposed (40%) and fewer than 1 in 10 were unsure (5%).

By comparison, about 4 in 10 adults who were not very or not at all familiar with needle exchange programs favored them (43%). Four in 10 were opposed (41%) and nearly 2 in 10 were unsure (16%).

Support for needle exchange programs among adults who were *more* familiar with them did not change since 2016. However, among adults who were *less* familiar with needle exchanges, the percentage of adults who opposed them declined from 2016 to 2018.