

STAP STATS 314 W. State St., Ithaca , NY 14850 www.aidsrideforlife.org www.stapinc.org 607-272-4098

Why We Ride: HIV/AIDS continues to be a major global public health issue, 75.7 million people have become infected since the start of the epidemic and 32.7 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses. There were an estimated 38 million people living with HIV at the end of 2019. Nevertheless, between 2000 and 2019, new HIV infections fell by 39% and HIV-related deaths fell by 51%, with 15.3 million lives saved due to ART (antiretroviral therapy). This achievement is the result of great efforts by many HIV programs, including STAP's.

The medications that allow survival cost money. The research to develop new treatments costs money. People with HIV often need information, housing and support services. Everybody.... needs education about prevention, especially the 13-29 age group. **For people with HIV within our eight county regions, the Southern Tier AIDS Program helps to provide support when family and friends can't and insurance doesn't.** All of this support costs money. AIDS is a pandemic, which many would prefer to forget, yet still urgently needs funds for the daily struggles. And for our clients seeking support who come to STAP/STCC, the hope and the help are all because of you.

You're helping give these grateful clients the tools and resources they need. These are lifesaving. Just last year hundreds of lives were saved with the Naloxone kits we distributed. LGBTQ youth and their allies find a warm and welcoming space at our Identity youth center. Men and women who return to Broome County from incarceration find support with our Reentry program. Because of you we are able to provide services for those who are living with HIV/AIDS and those who are Medicaid eligible and dealing with a chronic illness.

The AIDS Ride for Life is our major agency fundraiser. The money we raise within this event helps close some gaps between our funding streams and funding needs of STAP's programs and services. We encourage you to check us out at www.stapinc.org and www.aidsrideforlife.org

The Swift Rise of Heroin Use has increased the demand for our Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, our youth center is serving a record number of youths & along with caring for clients who have HIV/AIDS, we now provide services for anyone who is Medicaid eligible and dealing with a chronic illness. **In 2020, STAP provided 1,121 clients with care management, 1,975 individuals were served by our syringe exchange program and 286 lives were saved with the naloxone kits provided by STAP.**

Substance Use From June 2019-June 2020, 81,003 people died from a drug overdose, a 20% increase and the highest number of fatal overdoses ever recorded in the U.S. in a single year. The drug deaths started spiking last spring, as the coronavirus forced shutdowns, and more recent statistics from cities throughout the U.S. and Canada show the crisis has only deepened. The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in stress, isolation, and economic upheaval – all known triggers for addiction and relapse. Other pandemic-related factors may be increasing the death toll as well. As with other goods, supply chains for drugs have been unsettled during the pandemic. Experts said users turning to unknown suppliers can end up with counterfeit drugs that look like prescription pills but contain fentanyl, or with stimulants laced with fentanyl.

STAP offers people who use substances, their families and concerned community members training and the medication Naloxone (Narcan) to prevent overdose deaths due to opiate or heroin use. We work every day to protect our syringe exchange participants from the potential harm of drug use in

the hope that they may all survive long enough to quit. When someone does decide to quit, the staff is there to facilitate the process of entering treatment at a program that will address the specific needs of that person. If you or a loved one would like to be trained and receive an overdose prevention kit please contact STAP's Ithaca Office at 607-272-4098 or our Johnson City office at 607-237-0497 Ext 202

STAP's Syringe Exchange Program (SEP) The SEP is an essential part of the prevention services offered by the Southern Tier AIDS Program. In addition to free, anonymous syringe exchange, the SEP provides:

- Opioid overdose prevention program
- Safer injection supplies
- Safe needle disposal
- Safer sex supplies
- Referrals for substance use reduction
- Confidential HIV & Hepatitis C testing

The Substance Use program works with active substance users to provide risk assessment, goal setting, testing and referral services. Using reported risks, as well as the individual's desired treatment option, the staff work with individuals to design a plan for reducing risk, improving health, and entering the treatment modality of their choice. Staff members also offer individualized educational sessions to help improve understanding of treatment options, reduce stigma surrounding treatment, and increase the likelihood of success in treatment programs. If you are currently using substances and would like support or education to reduce you use, please come on in to the Johnson City or Ithaca offices to meet the staff!

Veterans & Substance Use

More than 2 of 10 Veterans with PTSD also have Substance Use Disorder. Veterans can't leave the horrors of war on the battlefield and substance use has been a part of war for centuries. The problem of addiction among returning veterans is a very real one. War is a horrifying, traumatizing and deeply stressful experience for everyone involved, and many veterans turn to drugs as a method of coping. Those with multiple deployments and combat exposure are at greatest risk of developing substance use problems. They are more apt to engage in new-onset heavy and binge drinking, and to suffer other drug-related problems, and to have greater prescribed use of behavioral health medications.

The Human Cost of Stigma

Harm Reduction Interventions such as syringe exchange create mixed feelings for some people and they struggle to understand how syringe exchange works and why it is a good intervention for both people who use drugs and society at large. Initially designed as a disease prevention strategy, syringe exchange has been wildly successful. New HIV infections due to shared injection equipment have been reduced by 96% in New York State over the last 25 years, largely due to syringe exchange. Syringe exchanges also offer a place to bring active substance users into medical care, substance use treatment, disease testing or assistance with basic needs like food, clothing and shelter. Those of us who work in syringe exchanges have an additional agenda. We care deeply about those we work with and understand that in accepting them as they are and treating them with dignity and humanity we can reduce the stigma they suffer as drug users and create a space for them to heal. We know that shaming them until they "hit bottom" will for many only result in death. As an AIDS service organization we have a long history of dealing with

stigma and we understand all too well the damage it inflicts on people's mental and physical health. We understand that the stigmatized begin to believe that they have no value and stop caring for themselves. What appears from the outside to be reckless is often the behavior of a person who sees no point or value in continuing to live in shame. We see it as central to our mission to offer hope to those who feel stigmatized that their lives are valuable and can improve. A HIV diagnosis is not a death sentence and neither is struggling with addiction.

Recent HIV Outbreak (2019) Public health officials are struggling to contain an outbreak of HIV among homeless drug users in Boston that has persisted since early 2019 and likely worsened as the pandemic limited access to services such as testing.

So far the outbreak has affected 113 people, with 13 new cases identified between Jan. 1 and Feb. 28. And the virus, which is deadly when untreated, is thought to be spreading undetected among people who inject drugs and lack stable housing.

The sharing of injection supplies is unfortunately a very common occurrence in the United States. Although syringe exchange is not necessarily a popular initiative, data shows it to be the single most effective public health intervention in the United States to help stop the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C. Restrictive laws around syringe access do little to prevent drug use, but do create an environment where drug use is pushed even further underground, due to stigma and fear of law enforcement. In New York syringe exchange is not only legal, but also supported with funds from the Department of Health. This has resulted in a dramatic change in the demographics of HIV infection over the course of the last twenty years. Whereas over 50% of PWID tested positive for HIV, prior to the implementation of legal syringe exchange programs in New York State, that figure is now around 3%. The Southern Tier AIDS Program is thankful to be able to offer these services throughout the Southern Tier. We currently operate a fixed site syringe exchange in both Broome and Tompkins Counties, as well as peer delivered syringe exchange in many other communities. These services provide life-saving access to sterile supplies, as well as Opioid Overdose Prevention Program (OOPP) training to prevent fatal overdose deaths in our communities. A needle that costs pennies can literally save millions.