

2023 AMERSA National Conference, Washington, DC, November 2023

# Implementing Harm Reduction Vending Machines in a California Veterans Affairs Syringe Services Program

Presenting Author	Co-Authors
<p><b>Tessa Rife-Pennington, PharmD, BCGP</b> <i>Pronouns: she/her/hers</i></p> <p>Harm Reduction Coordinator San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System</p> <p>Assistant Clinical Professor, Volunteer University of California, San Francisco, School of Pharmacy</p>	<p><b>Donna Dare, PharmD, FCSHP</b> Chief, Pharmacy Service San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System</p> <p><b>To-Nga Huynh, PharmD</b> Associate Chief, Quality, Safety, &amp; Value, Pharmacy Service San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System</p>

# Disclosures

- The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.
- The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.
- This work is funded by the National VA Pain Management, Opioid Safety, Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PMOP), National VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP), and the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System.

# Program Beginnings

2019-  
2020

- Overdose education and naloxone pilot for Veterans in supportive housing<sup>1</sup>
- Feedback: concern for fentanyl in drug supply, increasing overdoses

2020

- Fentanyl test kit pilot for substance treatment program<sup>2</sup>
- Feedback: expand access and supply types, bring to community

2021-  
2022

- Harm reduction kit pilot for Veterans in supportive housing<sup>3</sup>
- Feedback: expand types of supplies available (e.g., lotion, mouthwash)
- Challenges: bringing kits to housing site visits; Veterans may not want to or be available to engage; expanding reach beyond San Francisco

# Evidence for Harm Reduction Vending Machines<sup>1-7</sup>

## Injection Equipment

- ↑ access sterile syringes
- ↓ syringe sharing
- Likely cost efficient, low staffing requirements
- No ↑ unsafe disposal of used equipment, drug use, vandalism

## During COVID-19

- ↑ SSP engagement and supply distribution
- ↓ overdose deaths and hepatitis C virus incidence

## Additional Benefits

- ↑ anonymity, acceptance, accessibility, convenience, access outside business hours
- ↓ stigma, geographic, financial barriers

# Implementation Timeline

First pitch for VA funding - not approved

**November - December 2021**

Contracting process for first 8 machines  
Vendor registered at [SAM.gov | Home](https://sam.gov)  
Vendor added to facility vendor file

**May - July 2022**

**January - April 2022**

Met with community-based organizations  
Conducted market research  
Second pitch for VA funding - approved  
Initial stakeholder meetings

# Implementation Timeline, continued

Designed vending machine graphics wrap and plan-o-gram

**August 2022**

Vending machines delivered to VA clinics and housing sites

**December - April 2023**

**September - November 2022**

Contracting process for 7 additional machines  
First order delivered to VA warehouse  
Machines tagged by Engineering  
Contracting process for delivery to housing sites

# Implementation Timeline, continued

---

## April - May 2023

- Initial machine set-up
- 7 additional machines delivered to VA warehouse
- Machines tagged by Engineering
- Machines delivered to VA clinics
- Supply vendors added to facility vendor file
- First purchase orders of supplies
- Supply sorting, packing, shipping

## June - October 2023

- Machine setup, maintenance, stocking
- 10 machines live in August
- 4 machines live in September
- Registration events
- Supply sorting, packing, shipping

# Placement

---

## **2 San Francisco VA Medical Center**

- Opioid Treatment Program Clinic
- Mental Health Clinic

## **7 community-based outpatient clinics**

- Eureka
- Ukiah primary care
- Clearlake
- Santa Rosa
- Oakland primary care
- Oakland mental health
- Downtown San Francisco

## **6 Bay Area Veterans housing facilities**



# Design

## Your Life Matters.

The San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System  
**Harm Reduction & Syringe Services Program (SSP)** wants to protect *you* from:

Drug overdose	Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)	Hepatitis A, B, C viruses
Skin infections	Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)	Tuberculosis

We have **free** resources for Veterans, such as naloxone (Narcan) to reverse an opioid overdose.

We can also refer Veterans for:

- ✓ **Testing** for infections
- ✓ **Vaccines** to prevent infections like hepatitis A and B
- ✓ **Prevention and treatment** for HIV
- ✓ **Medications and treatment** to reduce drug cravings and use
- ✓ **Medications** to treat skin infections, STIs, and tuberculosis

Contact us today to get connected!

**Pharmacist**  
Tessa Rife-Pennington  
415-319-1193

**Mental Health Nurse Practitioner**  
Cedric Thurman  
415-624-7382

Here are some useful VA resources:

- **San Francisco Downtown Clinic:** 401 3<sup>rd</sup> St, San Francisco, CA 94107, 415-281-5100
- **Infectious Disease Clinic:** 415-750-6902
- **Walk-in Mental Health Care:** San Francisco VA Mental Health Clinic, Bldg. 203, ground floor, room GA-28
- **Opioid Treatment Program:** 415-221-4810 x22814 or x22050
- **Intensive Outpatient Program:** 415-221-4810 x23147



VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

## Your Life Matters.



San Francisco Veterans Affairs Health Care System  
**Harm Reduction & Syringe Services Program (SSP)**

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

# Supplies

## Safer Injection

- Syringes
- Sharps containers
- Tourniquets
- Alcohol swabs
- Wound care kits
- Cookers
- Sterile water
- Ascorbic acid powder

## Other Safer Use

- Snorting kits
- Rectal use kits
- Rubber mouthpieces
- Fentanyl and xylazine test strips

## Safer Sex

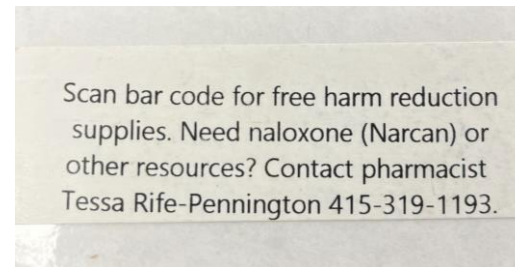
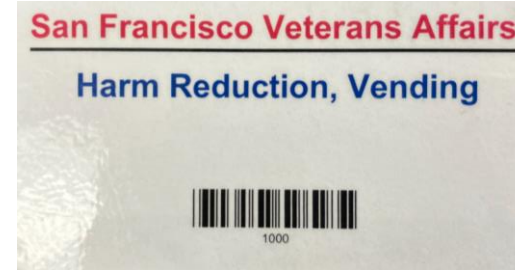
- Latex condoms
- Water-based lubricant

## Hygiene

- Hygiene kits
- Deodorant
- Lotion
- Mouthwash
- Hand sanitizer
- Lip balm

# FAQ's

- Scan QR code for program website
- Take business card, call pharmacist to sign up; staff referrals
- Quick registration in VA REDCap<sup>8,9</sup>
- Veterans of **any eligibility status** can register
- Laminated wallet card mailed, provided in person, accesses all 15 machines
- Scan bar code few inches below reader
- Enter item number(s) requested
- All supplies **free and anonymous**





# Challenges

- Navigating government contracting
- Delivery to VA & non-VA property
- Machine reconfiguration & maintenance
- Sourcing, ordering, receiving, unpacking, packaging, & re-shipping supplies
- Inventory tracking, loss, security
- Lack of storage space & full-time staff
- Managing staff expectations & stigma
- Negative press
- Machine relocation







# Successes

- **>115 Veterans** registered!
- Strong partnership pharmacy & logistics services
- Short-term help packing supplies & stocking machines
- Lockable storage cabinets for inventory
- Pilot social work registration at one clinic, plan for expansion
- Education opportunity, ↑ awareness & acceptance

# Pearls

## ↑ Veteran engagement

- Naloxone distribution & other supplies
- Infectious disease testing & treatment
- Substance use care

## Veterans sharing stories

- Distributing and administering naloxone
- Picking up syringes
- Handing out supplies

## Not just about drug use

- Trach tube → lubricant
- Diabetes → syringes/sharps containers
- Something in the machine anyone could use  
→ reduce stigma, common ground

# Next Steps

- Recruiting logistics and psychology technicians
- Expand social work registration process in outpatient clinics
- 38-gallon sharps disposal bins for community-based outpatient clinics
- UCSF research grant to evaluate program outcomes
  - Veteran and stakeholder feedback
  - Potential cost-benefit
  - Type/quantity of items dispensed, day/time of access, differences by location
- Long-term goal to customize machines to fit Veteran needs at each location

# References

1. Rife T, Tat C, Jones J, Pennington DL. An initiative to increase opioid overdose education and naloxone distribution for homeless veterans residing in contracted housing facilities. *J Am Assoc Nurse Pract*. 2021;34(1):188-195. Published 2021 Mar 12. doi:10.1097/JXX.0000000000000577.
2. Rife-Pennington T, Pennington D. A Pharmacist-Led Fentanyl Test Kit Pilot Program for Veterans Engaged in Addiction Treatment Services. 2023 ACCP Virtual Poster Symposium May 23 - 24, 2023. *J Am Coll Clin Pharm* (2023), 6: 759-835. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1833>.
3. Rife T, Allehyari A, Barajas A. Implementing a Harm Reduction Kit Pilot Program for Unstably Housed Veterans. CPNP 2022 Annual Meeting Poster Abstracts. *Mental Health Clinician* (2022) 12 (2): 89-174. <https://doi.org/10.9740/mhc.2022.04.089>.
4. Islam M, Wodak A, Conigrave KM. The effectiveness and safety of syringe vending machines as a component of needle syringe programmes in community settings. *Int J Drug Policy*. 2008;19(6):436-441. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2007.07.006.
5. Islam MM, Conigrave KM, Stern T. Staff perceptions of syringe dispensing machines in Australia: a pilot study. *Subst Use Misuse*. 2009;44(4):490-501. doi:10.1080/10826080802344757.
6. Arendt D. Expanding the accessibility of harm reduction services in the United States: Measuring the impact of an automated harm reduction dispensing machine. *J Am Pharm Assoc* (2003). 2023;63(1):309-316. doi:10.1016/j.japh.2022.10.027.
7. Allen ST, O'Rourke A, Johnson JA, et al. Evaluating the impact of naloxone dispensation at public health vending machines in Clark County, Nevada. *Ann Med*. 2022;54(1):2692-2700. doi:10.1080/07853890.2022.2121418.
8. Islam MM, Conigrave KM. Assessing the role of syringe dispensing machines and mobile van outlets in reaching hard-to-reach and high-risk groups of injecting drug users (IDUs): a review. *Harm Reduct J*. 2007;4:14. Published 2007 Oct 24. doi:10.1186/1477-7517-4-14.
9. Islam M, Stern T, Conigrave KM, Wodak A. Client satisfaction and risk behaviours of the users of syringe dispensing machines: a pilot study. *Drug Alcohol Rev*. 2008;27(1):13-19. doi:10.1080/09595230701711199.
10. McDonald D. The evaluation of a trial of syringe vending machines in Canberra, Australia. *Int J Drug Policy*. 2009;20(4):336-339. doi:10.1016/j.drugpo.2008.06.004.
11. PA Harris, R Taylor, R Thielke, J Payne, N Gonzalez, JG. Conde, Research electronic data capture (REDCap) - A metadata-driven methodology and workflow process for providing translational research informatics support, *J Biomed Inform*. 2009 Apr;42(2):377-81.
12. PA Harris, R Taylor, BL Minor, V Elliott, M Fernandez, L O'Neal, L McLeod, G Delacqua, F Delacqua, J Kirby, SN Duda, REDCap Consortium, The REDCap consortium: Building an international community of software partners, *J Biomed Inform*. 2019 May 9. doi: 10.1016/j.jbi.2019.103208.





## Team Members

## Acknowledgements

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thao Vu, PharmD</li> <li>• Renée Dembo, BS</li> <li>• Cedric Thurman, PMHNP</li> <li>• Sarah Burbank, MD</li> <li>• Wendy Furnas, LCSW</li> <li>• Shannon Stevens, LCSW</li> <li>• Andrew Ruggles, LCSW</li> <li>• Jenna Ferrara, LCSW</li> <li>• Mary Sanders, LCSW</li> <li>• Patricia Montalvo, RN</li> <li>• Art Hunt, RN</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logistics Service leadership team and staff</li> <li>• Pharmacy Service leadership team, staff, college and high school students</li> <li>• Susan Dugdale, Visual Information Specialist</li> <li>• Ariga Allehyari and Alec Barajas, PharmD Candidates</li> <li>• Steve Melas, S&amp;B Vending</li> <li>• Andrew Warner and Michael Robuck, VendNovation</li> <li>• Beth Dinges, PharmD, and Minh Ho, MD, VHA collaborators</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

*\*Veteran consent on file for photograph inclusion.*



# Harm Reduction Program

San Francisco VA Health Care System



## Thank you



Tessa Rife-Pennington, PharmD, BCGP



Tessa.Rife@va.gov



415-319-1193

