



Needle and Syringe Program Policy

1. Purpose

The Western Australian (WA) Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) is an evidence-based harm reduction strategy providing sterile injecting equipment to reduce blood-borne virus (BBV) transmission among people who inject drugs. Access to sterile needles and syringes is the primary public health strategy in Australia for prevention of BBV transmission, including HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C, and reduction of other injecting-related harms.

This policy applies to all WACHS staff who, in any capacity, are involved in the coordination, provision, or support of the NSP in WACHS, whether delivered through an NSP or NSEP (Needle and Syringe Exchange program), hereafter collectively referred to as NSP.

The *Medicines and Poisons Act 2014* and the *Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016* provide the legislative framework for needle and syringe provision in WA through NSPs approved by the Chief Executive Officer of the WA Department of Health (the Department).

WA Country Health Service (WACHS) and the NSP recognises the importance of providing culturally safe access to sterile injecting equipment, with appropriate disposal receptacles across all regions. This policy aligns with WACHS's commitment to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.

2. WACHS Needle and Syringe Program

2.1 Access to NSP

While pharmacies retail sterile injecting equipment, access is not guaranteed in all areas or during all hours. To support harm reduction in regional and remote areas, WACHS provides access to sterile needles and syringes at approved sites.

WACHS sites approved to provide the NSP must ensure that sterile injecting equipment is available in accordance with the Communicable Disease Control Directorate Guidelines: [Provision of Needle and Syringe Programs in Western Australia](#) and the Letter of Agreement between WACHS and the Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Program (SHBBVP). Access arrangements must be consistent with harm reduction principles and comply with all legislative requirements.

Where a local pharmacy is available and retails needles and syringes, it is a **minimum** requirement that WACHS sites delivering emergency after-hours services provide after-hours access to needles and syringes.

After-hours access refers to the hours during which the local or nearest community pharmacy is closed.

Where there is no local pharmacy, or the local pharmacy does not retail needles and syringes:

- WACHS sites that operate 24 hours are to provide 24-hour access to needles and syringes.
- WACHS sites that do not operate 24 hours are to provide access during their operating hours.

All WACHS staff, regardless of role, must always maintain client confidentiality as per the WA Health Mandatory Policy (MP) 0124/19 Code of Conduct Policy.

All WACHS sites, regardless of whether they offer an exchange service, are encouraged to provide value-added items in line with best-practice approaches. Value-added items include, but are not limited to, sterile water ampoules, swabs and condoms. Procurement is subject to approval by the appropriate delegated authority.

Legislatively, there is no minimum age for people accessing the needle and syringe program. The Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016 refers to NSP clients only as 'person'; that is, there is no limitation to access NSP with respect to a client's age, gender, race, or cultural background.

The quantity of needles and syringes provided per client may vary by site. Best practice supports an unlimited supply to reduce harm; however, this must be balanced with practical considerations such as site capacity and resource availability. Regional NSP Coordinators are required to liaise with the appropriate delegated authority, in collaboration with the WACHS Area Office team and the Department's Sexual Health and Blood-borne Virus Program (SHBBVP), through appropriate forums, to determine the maximum approved quantity considered appropriate at each location. Wherever feasible, supply should reflect the individual client's request.

2.2 Alignment with WA Department of Health guidelines and regulations

WACHS NSP delivery must align with the Department's guidelines:

- [Guideline: Provision of needle and syringe programs \(NSP\) in Western Australia](#)
- [Guidelines for the Operation and Maintenance of Needle and Syringe Vending Machines \(NSVMs\) and Needle and Syringe Dispensing Machines \(NSDMs\)](#)

WACHS NSP sites must comply with the *Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016* in the operation and coordination of the NSP.

2.3 Orientation and training requirements

There are two training packages available to support staff involved in NSP:

- [Needle and Syringe Program Orientation and Training](#) - A ten-module comprehensive training resource for NSP Coordinators provided by the Department and hosted on the Mental Health Commission website. Completion of this training is role-required for all NSP Coordinators who hold the approval to operate the program, as per the Department's Guidelines, and is monitored by the SHBBVP and WACHS Area Office.
- [WACHS Needle and Syringe Program eLearning](#) - This short online course provides an overview of the NSP and is tailored to WACHS staff contributing to the program. Completion of this training is recommended (role-required) for all other WACHS staff who support the NSP, including Emergency Department clerical staff,

nurses, and patient service assistants; Community Health staff; Mental Health staff; and Remote Area Clinic staff.

NSP Coordinators must ensure WACHS staff are adequately trained to deliver the program safely, uphold confidentiality, and minimise risks to clients and staff. Where barriers to training arise, these must be discussed with line managers first and escalated to the WACHS Area Office via the Program Lead if not resolved.

2.4 Program approvals and governance

The NSP Letter of Agreement is to be renewed every three years. This process is initiated by the SHBBVP and coordinated through the NSP Governance Group.

The NSP Governance Group, comprising representatives from WACHS and SHBBVP (with invitations extended to other agencies involved in the funding and delivery of NSPs across country WA), provides high-level oversight, including planning and strategy for WACHS NSP..

The WACHS NSP Coordinators Group, which includes WACHS Regional NSP Coordinators and WACHS Public Health Area Office representatives, and is convened and chaired by the WACHS Public Health Area Office, meets every two months to improve the sharing of information and facilitate discussion around any operational issues being experienced in the delivery of NSP and help keep WACHS NSP sites up to date with progress or changes in this area of work. Additionally, the group serves as a forum for identifying issues or risks and escalates matters requiring further action to the NSP Governance Group.

Proposed changes to any of the following elements must be escalated to the NSP Governance Group for noting or decision.

- coordination arrangements
- operating hours
- scope of services delivered.

2.5 Scope of responsibilities: regional and site NSP coordinators

Regional NSP Coordinators provide regional oversight and governance for the NSP and are responsible for program implementation across all regional NSP sites, liaison with WACHS Area Office and the SHBBVP, and ensuring program compliance, regional standardisation and consolidated reporting.

Site NSP Coordinators support the operational delivery of the NSP at their designated site and are responsible for day-to-day service provision in line with WACHS policy and guideline(s).

Depending on regional requirements, the Regional NSP Coordinator portfolio may be allocated, shared, or delegated to ensure necessary coverage of roles and responsibilities. Refer to [Section 3. Roles and Responsibilities](#) for detailed information.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

WACHS District Directors are responsible for:

- ensuring compliance with this policy across their districts through appropriate governance mechanisms
- supporting Regional NSP Coordinators in addressing compliance issues within their scope
- ensuring district resources including infrastructure, systems, and processes are in place to support effective program implementation in consultation with Regional NSP Coordinators, ensuring regional processes and monitoring mechanisms align with policy requirements.

WACHS Area Office Public Health Program Lead is responsible for:

- providing WACHS wide coordination, leadership, and governance of the NSP
- coordinating the Regional NSP Group, ensuring agendas and follow-up actions are maintained, and escalating issues or risks to the NSP Governance Group
- monitoring completion of NSP training as required by WACHS staff and supporting NSP coordinators in addressing compliance gaps
- reviewing regional WACHS NSP data and reports, ensuring accuracy and consistency prior to formal submission to SHBBVP
- monitoring WACHS NSP performance at a WACHS wide level
- ensuring relevant WACHS executive are briefed on NSP matters relevant to their jurisdiction
- co-ordinating NSP policy review and evaluation activities.

Managers are responsible for:

- ensuring staff are informed of this policy through induction and available education
- promoting NSP awareness via staff communications and the NSP intranet page
- ensuring staff NSP training compliance, where applicable.

Regional NSP Coordinators are responsible for:

- regional oversight of the NSP, ensuring consistent program implementation across all sites in alignment with WACHS policies and guidelines, CDCD guideline, and harm reduction principles
- monitoring and supporting site(s) compliance with legislative requirements, including *the Medicines and Poisons Act 2014*, and *Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016*
- facilitating communication and coordination between NSP sites to ensure standardised service delivery
- in consultation with managers, ensuring staff are appropriately inducted, trained and supported
- providing procedural guidance to site coordinators and managers on operational and compliance matters
- reviewing regional NSP data and supporting consolidated reports for submission to SHBBVP via WACHS Area Office
- participating in the Regional NSP Group, contributing to program development and continuous improvement initiatives
- escalating significant program risks, incidents, or operational concerns through the appropriate governance pathways
- maintaining records of regional program activities and correspondence in accordance with WACHS Records Management Policy
- assisting WACHS Area Office with financial forecasting and planning related to NSP value add items at a regional level.

Site NSP Coordinators are responsible for:

- ensuring that relevant NSP training and induction, facilitated by the Regional NSP Coordinator, are completed
- taking responsibility for the operational delivery of the NSP at their designated site in accordance with WACHS policy and guideline(s), with guidance from the relevant Regional NSP Coordinator as required
- ensuring sterile injecting equipment is available during site's operating hours, including arrangements for after-hours access where applicable
- ensuring correct storage, handling and distribution of NSP equipment in line with legislative and organisational requirements
- completing site-level NSP reporting accurately and submitting data within required timeframes
- completing the annual survey provided by the SHBBVP by the specified date to fulfill the requirement under the *Medicines and Poisons Act 2016* for an annual report to be completed
- liaising with Regional NSP Coordinator regarding operational issues, compliance concerns and client interactions standards
- implementing changes to the service delivery as directed by the Regional NSP Coordinator or WACHS Area Office
- promoting NSP awareness within their site, including health promotion campaign messages, updates on policy changes or operational requirements
- ensuring that proxy is appointed during extended (>2 weeks) leave and communicating the arrangement to the Regional NSP Coordinator.

All staff are required to comply with the directions in WACHS policies and procedures as per their roles and responsibilities. If staff are unsure which policies procedures and guidelines apply to their role or scope of practice, and/or are unsure of the application of directions they should consult their manager in the first instance.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the NSP is supported by the Regional NSP Group and NSP Governance Group.

Reports required under the terms of the Letter of Agreement are to be submitted to the WACHS Area Office by Regional NSP Coordinators or their delegated proxy where the portfolio is shared, delegated, or otherwise allocated.

In line with SHBBVP requirements, two report types are to be prepared and submitted:

- six-monthly Activity Reports against the agreed Output Performance Measures
- annual Expenditure Report against Output Specification Schedule

Both report types are to be completed using the standard template and reporting schedule set out in the WACHS Needle and Syringe Program Guide. SHBBVP may also request additional data throughout the reporting period.

5. References

Government of Western Australia, Department of Justice. (2014). *Medicines and Poisons Act 2014 (WA)*. Western Australia Legislation. [https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/law_a147008.html]

Government of Western Australia, Department of Justice. (2016). Western Australia Legislation. *Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016 (WA)*. [https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_13861_homepage.html]

Department of Health, Western Australia, Public and Aboriginal Health Division, Communicable Disease Directorate. (2022, January). *Guideline: Provision of needle and syringe programs (NSP) in Western Australia*. [https://www.health.wa.gov.au/~media/Corp/Documents/Health-for/Communicable-Diseases/Guidelines/Provision-of-needle-and-syringe-programs.pdf]

6. Definitions

Term	Definition
Needle and Syringe Program (NSP)	A harm reduction program that provides access to sterile injecting equipment, with an appropriate disposal receptacle, through approved facilities - including hospitals, dispensing or vending machines - to reduce transmission of blood-borne viruses.
Needle and syringe exchange program (NSEP)	Supply sterile needles and syringes with appropriate disposal receptacles and allow for the return of used needles and syringes.
Sexual Health and Blood-borne Viruses Program (SHBBVP)	The WA Department of Health program, within Communicable Disease Control Directorate, responsible for statewide NSP policy and approvals.
Needle and syringe dispensing machine (NSDM)	Self-service devices which dispense sterile injecting equipment on free of charge.
After-hours availability	The hours during which the local or nearest pharmacy is closed.
Emergency after-hours services	Emergency access via the emergency department at a public hospital facility.
Letter of Agreement	A formal agreement between WACHS and WA DoH SHBBVP that outlines NSP requirements and responsibilities.

7. Document Summary

Coverage	WACHS-wide
Audience	WACHS staff involved in coordination and provision of the NSP in WACHS.
Records Management	Corporate Recordkeeping Compliance Policy
Related Legislation	• Medicines and Poisons Act 2014 • Medicines and Poisons Regulations 2016
Related Mandatory Policies / Frameworks	• Public Health Framework • Clinical Governance, Safety and Quality Framework • WA Department of Health Code of Conduct
Related WACHS Policy Documents	• WACHS Risk Management 2020 • WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015-2030
Other Related Documents	• Communicable Disease Control Directorate Guideline: Provision of needle and syringe programs (NSP) in Western Australia • Communicable Disease Control Directorate Guidelines for the Operation and Maintenance of Needle and Syringe Vending Machines (NSVM) and Needle and Syringe Dispensing Machines (NSDM)
Related Forms	Nil
Related Training	• Online needle and syringe program (NSP) orientation and training package • WACHS Needle and Syringe Program eLearning
Aboriginal Health Impact Statement Declaration (ISD)	The completion of an Aboriginal Health Impact Statement and Declaration (ISD) is required for all new and revised policy documents. For further information, please see the ISD Guidelines . ISD Record ID: 4614
National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards	1.15
Aged Care Quality Standards	Nil
Chief Psychiatrist's Standards for Clinical Care	Nil
Other Standards (please specify and include link)	Nil

8. Document Control

Version	Published date	Current from	Summary of changes
2.00	8 July 2026	8 July 2026	- Targeted amendments to improve operational clarity and consistency across WACHS - Roles and responsibilities clarified, including Regional NSP Coordinator and Site NSP Coordinator - WACHS Area Office Program Lead role included - Compliance requirements strengthened - Reporting requirements clarified - Training requirements refined to distinguish between WACHS and external education activities - Definitions updated and policy content aligned with WA Department of Health guidance
2.01	10 July 2026	8 July 2026	Minor amendments to update links

9. Approval

Policy Owner	Executive Director Clinical Excellence
Co-approver	Executive Director Nursing and Midwifery Services
Contact	Area Office Program Officer
Business Unit	Public Health
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