Syringe Redemption Pilot Program
Jan 2025-Present

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Risk Reduction

A philosophical and political movement founded by and for people who use drugs focused on shifting power and resources to people most vulnerable to structural violence.

In practice, risk reduction is a set of principles.

- ❏ Acknowledges that drug use does happen, and attempts to minimize risk
- ❏ Non-judgemental, non-coercive care
- ❏ Includes direct input from those with lived
- ❏ Provides agency in decision making

Risk Reduction Services at Portland Public Health

- ❑ Syringe Service Program
- ❑ HIV/HCV Testing
- ❑ Treatment and Other Service Referrals through Patient Navigators
- ❑ Basic Needs
- ❑ Naloxone Distribution
- ❑ Overdose Prevention, Recognition, and Response Trainings
- ❑ Sharps Disposal
- ❑ Immunizations for Hepatitis A or B
- ❑ Wound Care

The Exchange

39 Forest Ave, Portland, ME
Mon,Wed, Thur: 9am-4pm
Friday: 10am-4pm

SSP services

Street/ shelter outreach
Mon, Wed, Fri 1-3pm

Historical Background for Program Implementation

An increase in syringe litter led to the development of a syringe services operational improvement plan implemented in fall 2024. Simultaneously, Portland Public Health began exploring opportunities to utilize national opioid settlement funds allocated to Portland. The Syringe Redemption Pilot Project was approved in October, 2024 and implemented in January, 2025.

Syringe Collection Action Plan

GOAL

Decrease incidence of improperly disposed syringes

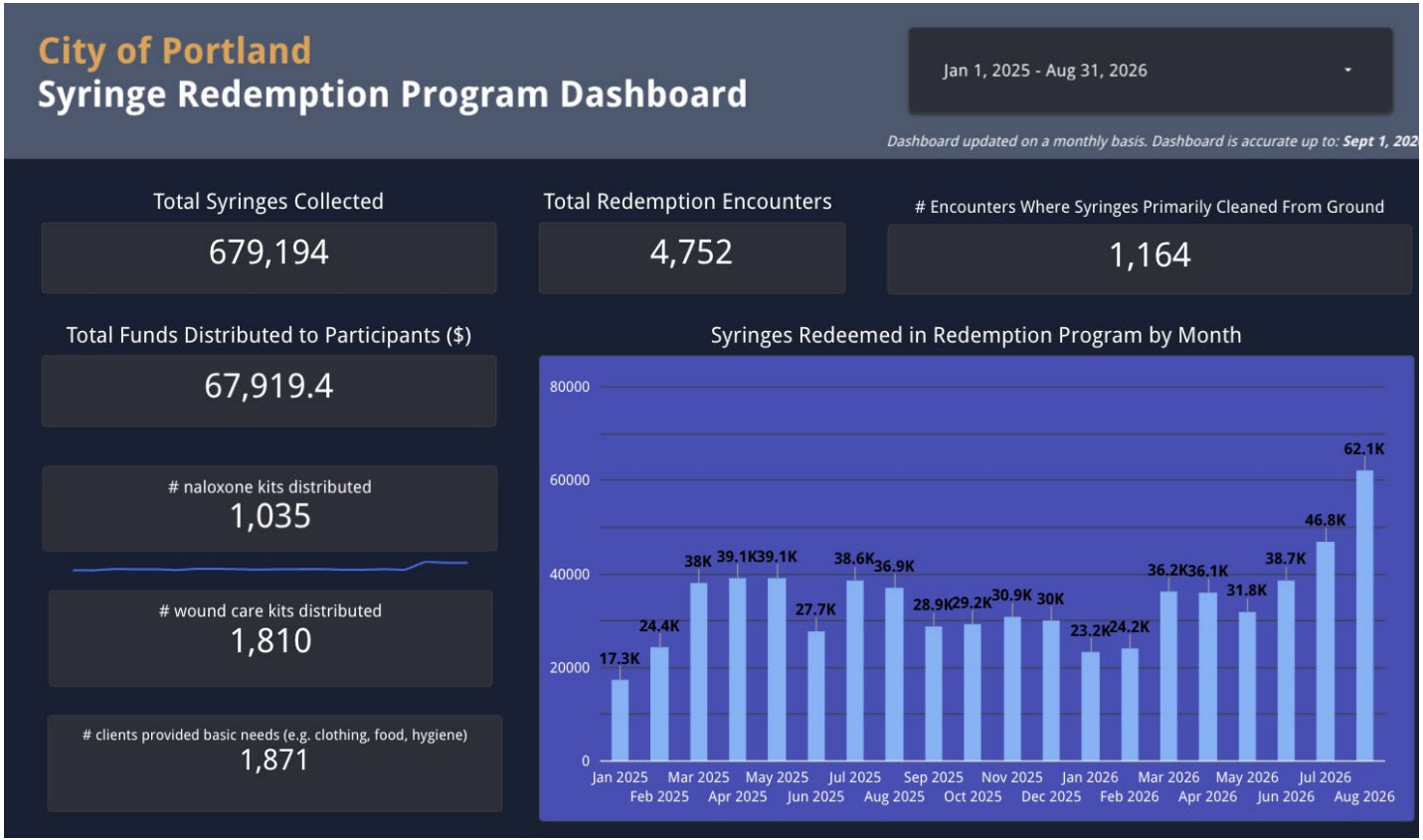
Strategies

- Promote:
  - Convenience & usage of community sharps boxes
  - Options for reporting improperly disposed syringes
  - Risk reduction services offered by PPH
- Increase:
  - Public Health Division staff time collecting syringes
  - Pathways to report improperly disposed syringes
  - Education to clients & other community members
- Utilize:
  - Feedback from clients & community members
  - Data to evaluate efforts and improve future strategies

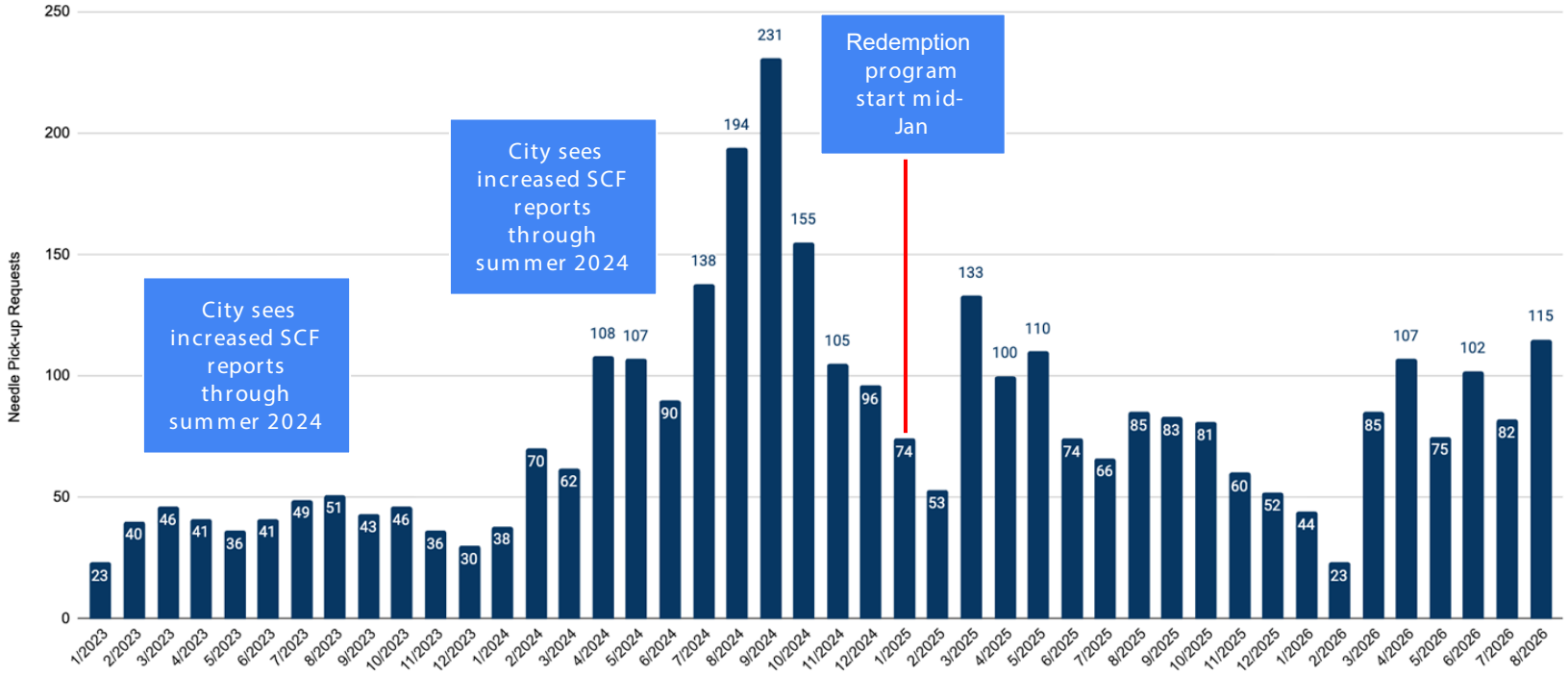
Parameters of the Program

- Participants must be an enrolled participant in our Syringe Service Program.
- Participants must sign and go over several documents with staff including safety protocol, liability waiver, and our Community agreements.
- 10 cents a syringe and a weekly cap of $20.00 per person.
- Participants are encouraged to bring back syringes in sharps containers.
- Hours of operation for this programming are currently 10am-3pm was previously 10-11am and 2-3pm.

High Utilization!



SeeClickFix Reports for Needle Pick-up, Portland, Maine (Jan 2023-Aug 2026)



Return rate increased 61% →80%

	Jan 1–Dec 31, 2024	Jan 1–Dec 31, 2025	Jan 1–Aug 31, 2026*
Unique clients served	2,498	1,957	1,216
Total clients enrolled	277	301	147
Total syringe exchanges	8,620	8,393	4,629
# Syringes distributed	952,411	1,107,581	610,811
# Syringes collected	577,517	877,596	490,948
Return Rate (%)	61%	79%	80.4%

Conclusions

At this time, Public Health staff are confident that the Syringe Redemption Program is both contributing to an overall reduction in the improper disposal of syringes in Portland and providing a valuable opportunity for SSP clients to directly receive Opioid Settlement Funds, as intended. In addition to the environmental and financial benefits of the program, as outlined in the themes from the focus groups, clients are utilizing prevention activities (HIV/HCV testing), accessing basic needs, and continuing to engage in

Interpreting syringe litter trends before and after program launch requires caution, because a simple pre/post comparison does not address what litter would have looked like had the program never started. The program launched during a period of significant and documented growth in the client population accessing Portland's SSP, which peaked at over 800 unique clients per month in late 2024 and early 2025, roughly triple the volume seen in 2022-2023.

Portland's Syringe Redemption Program is historic as the third such program in the country following Boston and New York City. Boston's Community Syringe Redemption Program, which ran from 2020 to 2024 before a funding lapse, is the subject of the only published peer-reviewed evaluation of this model to date (Le et al., Policy Studies Journal, 2025). They found significant reductions in syringe complaints and publicly discarded syringes within a half-mile of the redemption site, but not beyond this radius, underscoring the difficulty with implying causation to evaluating these programs from basic counts.

Focus Groups: Direct input from our clients

What was the feedback was given?

- The program is highly valued among participants
- Financial incentive is the primary participation driver
- There are clear and consistent community safety benefits
- Program capacity limits engagement
- Eligibility rules can be perceived as inequitable and stigmatizing
- Participation improves health and safety practices
- Redemption serves as a gateway to health services
- Supply gaps (grabbers, puncture proof gloves) limit potential
- Ending the program may rapidly reverse gains

How we used the feedback?

- Implementation of more open hours.
- Purchased more grabber tools for participants.
- Increase in funds allowed for more participation approved by city council.
- Increased advertising at community partner events.
- Increased conversations about PREP and PEP amongst clients and the accessibility to those resources through our STD Clinic.
- Staff continue to have conversations with clients about where they are seeing litter in the city to inform where our staff needs to focus pick up efforts.

Next Steps

Our team continues to evaluate the program on a quarterly basis and talk about ways in which we can improve.

We look to hold another focus session soon to gather more feedback!

We continue our own pickup efforts in the city along with collaboration from other departments.

Looking for alternative funding to continue our former Ambassador Program!

Big takeaway: Engaging with clients who otherwise would not come in and who we can provide other services to such as yourselves!

Case Presentation

City of portland

Questions & Answers

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