



## Pa. to allow syringe sales without Rx

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PHILADELPHIA, PA (September 15, 2009) – In a significant public health development aimed at reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C virus among injection drug users, Pennsylvania will now allow over-the-counter pharmacy sales of hypodermic needles and syringes. The new regulation amends the former rule, which permitted pharmacists to sell syringes only to individuals with a physician’s prescription. As amended, pharmacists are free to sell syringes without limitation. This legal change is effective immediately.

Commenting on this development, Scott Burris, professor at Temple University’s Beasley School of Law and national authority on syringe regulation and HIV prevention, said, “This is a chance for every pharmacy to become part of HIV prevention in Pennsylvania. The pharmacy board has taken an important step forward for evidence-based policy.”

The change in state pharmacy regulations comes as a result of more than a decade of advocacy efforts by a broad coalition of pharmacists and other health care providers, HIV/AIDS service organizations, public health professionals, legislators, lawyers and individual HIV-prevention activists. In 2007, in response to these concerns, the state Pharmacy Board began the process, including opportunities for public comment and legislative input, to amend its syringe regulation. The Pennsylvania Independent Regulatory Review Commission approved the final regulation in July 2009, which became effective upon its publication in the Pennsylvania Bulletin last Saturday (Sept. 12, 2009).

The change in the law reflects well-established evidence that increased access to clean needles and syringes is essential in reducing the spread of hepatitis C virus (HCV) and HIV and that such a change will not result in increased drug use. Only two states --New Jersey and Delaware -- continue to impose a prescription requirement for pharmacy sales.

“This change is particularly important in Pennsylvania because we have only two locations -- Philadelphia and Pittsburgh -- in which legally authorized syringe exchange programs operate,” said David Webber, an attorney with the AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania. “These two programs alone are simply not adequate to address this problem across the entire state, but syringe exchange programs continue to be crucial in providing sterile syringes as well as access to drug treatment and health care for injection drug users.” Based on national estimates of the number of injection drug users, experts estimate that there are from 9,000 to 13,000 such drug users in Philadelphia alone.

The full text of the amended Pharmacy Board regulation is available at <http://www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol39/39-37/1681.html> (Pa. Bulletin, September 12, 2009).

The AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania, founded in 1988, is a nonprofit, public interest law firm providing free legal services statewide to people with HIV/AIDS and others affected by the epidemic. Each year, the AIDS Law Project receives about 2,000 calls for assistance at its home office in Philadelphia. The AIDS Law Project also educates the public about AIDS-related legal issues, and works at local, state and national levels to achieve fair laws and policies.