

# New law to remove restriction on peer distribution of sterile needles and syringes

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## Statement from the Department of Health

On Wednesday 4 August 2021, amended laws came into effect that legalise the secondary supply or “peer distribution” of sterile injecting equipment obtained from a needle and syringe program (NSP). This change supports the Victorian Government’s commitment to harm reduction initiatives in response to the 2018 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Drug Law Reform.

The legislative change will now mean it is no longer an offence for a person who collects sterile injecting equipment from an NSP to give that equipment to their peers; an important practice that ensures clean needles and syringes reach the most vulnerable people in the community.

This supports the role of Victoria’s NSP in minimising transmission of blood borne viruses that can occur from shared injecting equipment. It further reduces stigma and sends a clear signal to people who may already engage in the practice of peer distribution that harm reduction practices are valued and encouraged.

The Department of Health encourages organisations and individuals across Victoria’s alcohol and other drug treatment system to share news of this important change through their formal and informal networks.

The legislative amendments that commenced on 4 August also support the next phase of harm reduction reform to increase access to naloxone. Regulations relating to who may supply, possess, administer and use Schedule 3 naloxone are currently under development and are expected to come into effect later in 2021.

These regulations will increase naloxone access by allowing trained workers at NSPs and other organisations such as Victoria’s medically supervised injecting room, to supply naloxone to members of the community who may be at risk of opioid overdose. The role of peers will also be enhanced through this reform.

The Department of Health will shortly conduct further engagement with key sector stakeholders about the changes to Victoria’s naloxone supply arrangements.