



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Damien Center Unveils New Mobile Unit for Organization's First Safe Syringe Exchange Program

INDIANAPOLIS – The [Damien Center](https://www.damien.org), Indiana's oldest and largest AIDS service organization (ASO), joined the Marion County Public Health Department to announce the launch of a new harm reduction and Safe Syringe Exchange Program (SSP) and to unveil a new mobile unit that will be used to reduce the spread of HIV and hepatitis C cases among injection drug users in Marion County.

Damien Center, 26 N. Arsenal Ave., Indianapolis, will serve as a fixed safe syringe program site at least two days per week, with two Harm Reduction Specialists providing access to sterile needles and syringes, harm-reduction kits, HIV and hepatitis C screenings, naloxone, immunizations, peer recovery coaching, and referrals for substance use disorder treatment. Harm Reduction Specialists will also utilize the new mobile unit three days per week out in the community to deliver safe syringe exchange services and vital support services, including HIV, STI and hepatitis C rapid screening, and referral for substance use disorder and mental health treatment.

Approximately 5,000 people are thought to be actively injecting drugs in Marion County and the surrounding area, based on estimates from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). A significant number of these people who inject drugs are young, insecurely housed, and with limited access to behavioral health services and harm reduction programs, placing them at risk for HIV, hepatitis C and overdose.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention finds that new users of syringe exchange programs are five times as likely to enter drug treatment, close to three times more likely to stop using drugs than people who don't use the programs, and that these programs are associated with an approximately 50% reduction in HIV and hepatitis C virus incidence.

"Damien Center's new program will help ensure that safe syringe services reach those populations that can benefit the most," said Alan Witchey, president and CEO of Damien Center. "These programs have been shown to dramatically reduce HIV risk and can provide an entry point for a range of supportive services to help stop drug use, overdose deaths, and infectious diseases."

"My thanks to the Damien Center for their partnership in this safe syringe program, a critical resource in our work to end HIV in Marion County," said Dr. Virginia A. Caine, MD, Director and Chief Medical Officer of the Marion County Public Health Department. "The safe syringe program will prevent HIV infections in our community and help us reach our goal to reduce new HIV infections in Marion County by at least 90% by 2030."

The program is made possible by a \$95,000 matching grant from the Marion County Public Health Department and is part of their plan to end the HIV epidemic in Marion County. The goal is to reduce the number of new HIV infections in the county by 75% by 2025, and then by at least 90% by 2030, for an estimated 2,000 total HIV infections averted in Marion County during the coming decade.

For more information on the Safe Syringe Program at Damien Center, including hours and location, please visit www.damien.org or call 317.632.0123.

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About Damien Center:

Damien Center is Indiana's oldest and largest AIDS service organization and leads the effort to prevent the spread of HIV. The Center opened in 1987 and offers a one-stop-shop model of care that includes preventive, supportive, and medical services that empowers people in Central Indiana affected by HIV/AIDS to move forward each day with dignity so they may live abundant and productive lives. Damien Center believes passionately in the dignity and worth of every person who seeks their services and strives to be a safe and welcoming place so that no barriers separate people from the services they need to prolong and enhance their lives. For more information visit: <http://www.damien.org> or follow them on Twitter at [@DamienCenter](https://twitter.com/DamienCenter) or like them on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/thedamiencenter/>.

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