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## **An assessment of current trends in injection drug use in the Twin Cities transgender and gender-non-conforming population.**

**Prepared in partnership with**  
Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition

**Prepared by**  
Dylan Flunker  
Research Assistant  
University of Minnesota

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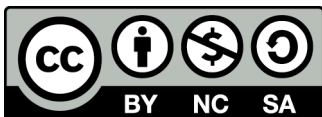
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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA)  
University of Minnesota  
330 HHH Center  
301--19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455  
Phone: (612) 625-1551  
Fax: (612) 626-0273  
E-mail: [cura@umn.edu](mailto:cura@umn.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.cura.umn.edu>

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## **Executive Summary**

The Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition (MTHC) is committed to improving health care access and the quality of health care received by transgender and gender-non-conforming people through education, resources, and advocacy. MTHC accomplishes these goals primarily by providing trainings for health care professionals on best practices for providing care for transgender and gender-non-conforming clients, hosting the annual Minnesota Trans Health Conference for community members and health care providers, running a transgender support group, and operating the drop-in Shot Clinic for syringe exchange and peer assisted doctor prescribed hormone injections.

The goal of this project was to provide a preliminary summary of injection drug use in the transgender and gender-non-conforming communities in the Twin Cities. This project conducted an analysis of syringe exchange records from 2010 and 2011 at the MTHC Shot Clinic. The research focused on determining how many transgender clients are using street drugs in addition to doctor prescribed hormones, and which street drugs they are using.

## **Metropolitan Area Demographics**

According to the 2010 census, the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area has a population of 2,588,907. The population is predominantly White at 80.1%. 9.1% of the population is African-American. Asian-Pacific Islanders account for 6.1% of the population, Native Americans 0.7% and Hispanics of all races 6% (Falkowski, 2011). No substantive research has been done to discover what percentage of the population in the Twin Cities metropolitan area identifies as transgender or gender-non-conforming. However, the National Center for Transgender Equality estimates that nationally between 0.25-1% of the population identifies as transgender (NCTE 2009). Using the 2010 census results, a tentative estimate of the transgender population of the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area is 6,472 to 25,889. Research by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) analyzing drug abuse trends in the Twin Cities found that of patients admitted to substance abuse programs 4.9% were admitted for cocaine/crack, 6.3% were admitted for methamphetamine, 8% were admitted for heroin, 8.3% were admitted for other opiates, and the remainder were admitted for alcohol, marijuana or other drug abuse (Falkowski, 2011). Another study conducted by DHS found that approximately 2.6% of the residents in the metropolitan area had used illicit drugs other than marijuana in the past year (McAlpine et al, 2006).

## **Methods**

The researcher partnered with the Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition to quantitatively analyze their syringe exchange records from 2010 to 2011. The syringe exchange collects information on each client for each exchange that occurs. The syringe exchange is primarily directed at trans and gender-non-conforming clients, however cisgender clients are never turned away. Syringe exchanges occur predominantly at the Shot Clinic operated out of the MTHC office three times a week, and less frequently through in the field exchanges done by an addiction and homelessness nurse/caseworker. The clients' gender, ethnicity, drug of choice, and the number of used syringes exchanged for new syringes are collected. During 2011, the information collected was expanded to include the number of injection kits, crack kits, and safer sex kits distributed. However, that data beyond the scope of this report; without any previous data to compare it to the analysis could not reveal any trends. The data collected in 2010 and 2011 was used to determine general usage trends in the transgender and gender-non-conforming communities served by MTHC.

## 2010 Results

In 2010 the syringe exchange performed a total of 399 exchanges. Clients exchanged 6,539 used syringes for 7,612 new syringes. 68.42% of exchanges were for syringes used to inject hormones, while 31.58% were syringes used to inject other substances. Of the 31.58% of exchanges for syringes used to inject other substances, the most prevalent drugs were heroin at 9.52% followed by methadone at 6.51%, methamphetamine at 5.26%, opiates at 3.26% and speed at 2.01%. The remaining exchanges were for B-12, cocaine, ecstasy, insulin, and prescription drugs.

2010 Drug of Choice Percentages		
Drug	Number of Exchanges	Percentage of Exchanges
B-12	1	0.2506%
Cocaine	4	1.0025%
Methadone	26	6.5163%
Ecstasy	1	0.2506%
Heroin	38	9.5238%
Insulin	1	0.2506%
Methamphetamine	21	5.2632%
Opiates	13	3.2581%
Prescription Drugs	3	0.7519%
Speed	8	2.0050%
Hormones	273	68.4211%
No Answer	10	2.5063%

In 2010 the largest percentage of exchanges were for clients that identified as transgender men at 56.64%, followed by 22.56% identifying as cisgender (not transgender) men, 10.28% identifying as transgender women, 9.77% identifying as cisgender women, and 1% who did not disclose their gender.

2010 Gender Percentages		
Gender	Number of Clients	Percentage of Clients
Transgender Female	41	10.2757%
Transgender Male	226	56.6416%
Cisgender Female	38	9.7744%
Cisgender Male	90	22.5564%
No Answer	4	1.0025%

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The majority of exchanges were with clients identified as White at 72.18%. 7.27% of exchanges were with clients identified as Black, 12.28% with clients that identified as Latina or Latino, 1.25% with clients

that identified as Multiracial or Mixed-race, 1.5% with clients that identified as Asian-Pacific Islander, 4.51% with clients that identified as Native Americans, and 1% with clients that did not disclose their ethnicity.

<b>2010 Ethnicity Percentages</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Exchanges</b>	<b>Percentage of Exchanges</b>
White	288	72.1805%
Black	29	7.2682%
Latina/Latino	49	12.2807%
Multiracial or Mixed Race	5	1.2531%
Asian-Pacific Islander	6	1.5038%
Native American	18	4.5113%
No Answer	4	1.0025%

While the number of exchanges in all gender categories were predominantly for white people, white transgender women and men were much more likely to exchange syringes than white cisgender women and men. The syringe exchange was more likely to serve transgender men than transgender women of all ethnicities with the exception of Asian-Pacific Islanders.

<b>2010 Ethnicity and Gender</b>						
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>					<b>Total</b>
	Transgender Female	Female	Transgender Male	Male	No Answer	
White	33	21	172	61	1	288
Black	3	4	11	11	0	29
Latina/Latino	2	2	37	8	0	49
Multiracial/Mixed Race	0	1	2	2	0	5
Asian-Pacific Islander	3	1	1	1	0	6
Native American	0	8	3	7	0	18
No Answer	0	1	0	0	3	4
<b>Total Exchanges</b>	41	38	226	90	4	399



With the exceptions of Native Americans and those that did not disclose their ethnicity, hormones are the predominant substance used across ethnicities. In conjunction with the tables for drug of choice and gender, this indicates that for the most part the syringe exchange is doing a good job getting transgender people sterile syringes for their hormone injections. It also indicates that the Native Americans served by the syringe exchange are not transgender, but still a valuable segment of the Twin Cities community served by the syringe exchange.

2010 Drug of Choice and Ethnicity								
Drug of Choice	Ethnicity							Total
	Asian-Pacific Islander	Black	Latina/Latino	Multiracial/Mixed Race	Native	White	No Answer	
B-12	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cocaine	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
Methadone	0	3	3	0	1	19	0	26
Ecstasy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Heroin	1	7	5	1	4	19	1	38
Insulin	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Meth	0	1	1	2	5	12	0	21
Opiates	1	1	0	0	4	7	0	13
Prescription Drugs	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
Speed	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8
Hormones	4	13	39	2	1	214	0	273
Unknown	0	1	0	0	1	6	2	10
<b>Total</b>	6	29	49	5	18	288	4	399

Overall, in 2010 the transgender clients of the syringe exchange mostly did not report using injected drugs other than their hormones. This indicates that transgender people who used the syringe exchange potentially used other injection drugs less frequently than non-transgender people.

Alternatively, it could indicate that transgender people who used the syringe exchange only reported using the syringes for hormones while also using them for other injection drug purposes. In 2010 the

syringe exchange served more cisgender males than transgender females, this is an area for improvement.

<b>2010 Drug of Choice and Gender</b>						
<b>Drug of Choice</b>	<b>Gender</b>					<b>Total</b>
	Transgender Female	Female	Transgender Male	Male	No Answer	
B-12	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cocaine	0	3	0	1	0	4
Methadone	0	8	1	17	0	26
Ecstasy	0	1	0	0	0	1
Heroin	3	11	2	21	1	38
Insulin	0	0	0	0	1	1
Meth	0	8	0	13	0	21
Opiates	0	2	3	8	0	13
Prescription Drugs	0	2	0	1	0	3
Speed	0	0	0	8	0	8
Hormones	38	0	218	17	0	273
Unknown	0	2	2	4	2	10
<b>Total</b>	41	38	226	90	4	399

## 2011 Results

In 2011 the syringe exchange performed a total of 721 exchanges. Clients exchanged 8,212 used syringes for 11,020 new syringes. 71.15% of exchanges were for syringes used to inject hormones, while 28.85% were syringes used to inject other substances. Of the 28.85% of exchanges for syringes used to inject other substances, the most prevalent drugs were heroin at 16.37% followed by methamphetamine at 3.33%, methadone at 2.77%, and opiates at 2.08%. The remaining exchanges were for cocaine, prescription drugs, speed, or the client did not wish to provide information about their drug choice. The percentage of exchanges for clients using syringes for heroin increased by almost 7%, the largest increase in client’s drug of choice percentages.

<b>2011 Drug of Choice Percentages</b>		
<b>Drug</b>	<b>Number of Exchanges</b>	<b>Percentage of Exchanges</b>
B-12	0	0.0000%
Cocaine	6	0.8322%
Methadone	20	2.7739%
Ecstasy	0	0.0000%
Heroin	118	16.3662%
Insulin	0	0.0000%
Methamphetamine	24	3.3287%
Opiates	15	2.0804%
Prescription Drugs	6	0.8322%
Speed	1	0.1387%
Hormones	513	71.1512%
No Answer	18	2.4965%

In 2011 the largest percentage of exchanges were for clients that identified as transgender men at 47.85%, followed by 29.26% identifying as cisgender men, 10.68% identifying as transgender women, 9.71% identifying as cisgender women, 1.25% identifying as gender-non-conforming and 1.25% who did not disclose their gender. The percentages of clients who identified as transgender women, cisgender women, and those who did not disclose their gender remained roughly the same between 2010 and 2011. However, the percentage of clients identifying as transgender men dropped by almost 10% and the percentage of clients identifying as cisgender men increased by approximately 8%. This fluctuation

may indicate that some transgender men are no longer wishing to be out as transgender, even at a syringe exchange run by an explicitly transgender oriented organization. Alternatively it may also be the effect of some transgender men moving away from the city, or the effect of some transgender men learning to do their doctor-prescribed hormone injections themselves and returning to the syringe exchange less frequently. In 2011 the syringe exchange added gender-non-conforming as a possible option when collecting information on gender, in future years this percentage may shift.

<b>2011 Gender Percentages</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Clients</b>	<b>Percentage of Clients</b>
Transgender Female	77	10.6796%
Transgender Male	345	47.8502%
Cisgender Female	70	9.7087%
Cisgender Male	211	29.2649%
Gender-non-conforming	9	1.2482%
No Answer	9	1.2482%

The majority of exchanges were with clients identified as White at 69.49%. 10.26% of exchanges were with clients identified as Black, 5.69% with clients that identified as Latina/Latino, 3.74% with clients that identified as Multiracial or Mixed-race, 4.3% with clients that identified as Asian-Pacific Islander, 4.3% with clients that identified as Native American, and 2.22% with clients that did not disclose their ethnicity. The biggest change from 2010 to 2011 was that the percentage of clients that identified as Latina or Latino dropped by around 6%, decreasing by almost a half. Additionally, exchanges with clients that identified as Black increased by around 3%. Exchanges with clients that identified as Multiracial or Mixed-race, Asian-Pacific Islanders, or did not disclose their ethnicity increased while exchanges with clients that identified as White decreased slightly. Of particular interest is the increase in clients identifying as Multiracial or Mixed Race in 2010 at 1.25% to 3.74% in 2011. The percentage of exchanges with clients that identified as Native Americans remained stable.

<b>2011 Ethnicity Percentages</b>		
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number of Exchanges</b>	<b>Percentage of Exchanges</b>
White	501	69.4868%
Black	74	10.2635%
Latina/Latino	41	5.6865%
Multiracial or Mixed Race	27	3.7448%
Asian-Pacific Islander	31	4.2996%
Native American	31	4.2996%
No Answer	16	2.2191%

As in 2010, in 2011 clients in all gender identities were predominantly white. In particular, transgender women and men and also clients that identified as gender-non-conforming were more likely to be white than any other ethnicity. In general in 2011 the number of client exchanges increased in all categories, however mostly in the same percentages of the total client population as 2010. Notably, in 2011 the percentage of Black transgender males almost doubled from the percentage of Black transgender males in 2010, jumping from 2.76% to 4.58%, while the percentage of White transgender males dropped from 43.11% to 32.73% of all exchanges. It will be interesting in the future to see if gender-non-conforming continues to be an almost solely White gender identity, or if clients of other ethnicities also identify with gender-non-conforming.

<b>2011 Ethnicity and Gender</b>							
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Gender</b>						<b>Total</b>
	Transgender Female	Female	Transgender Male	Male	Gender-non-conforming	No Answer	
White	59	51	236	144	8	3	501
Black	3	2	33	34	1	1	74
Latina/Latino	0	3	35	3	0	0	41
Multiracial/Mixed Race	13	2	7	5	0	0	27
Asian-Pacific Islander	1	2	16	12	0	0	31
Native American	1	8	13	8	0	1	31
No Answer	0	2	5	5	0	4	16
<b>Total Exchanges</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>721</b>

From 2010 to 2011 the number of exchanges increased for heroin increased in most ethnicities except Latina/Latino and Asian-Pacific Islander, where the percentage of exchanges for heroin decreased slightly. The increase in exchanges for heroin was most pronounced in white clients, increasing from 4.76% of all exchanges in 2010 to 9.71% of exchanges in 2011. Black client exchanges for heroin also increased from 1.75% in 2010 to 3.32% of all exchanges in 2011. 2011 also saw a decrease in the number of exchanges for methadone in all ethnicities. There was also a slight increase in the percentage of clients exchanging syringes for hormones across all categories except for Latina/Latino. From 2010 to 2011, the percentage of clients identifying as Multiracial/Mixed Race and exchanging syringes for hormones increased from .5% to 3.19% of all exchanges.

2011 Drug of Choice and Ethnicity								
Drug of Choice	Ethnicity							
	Asian-Pacific Islander	Black	Latina/Latino	Multiracial/Mixed Race	Native	White	No Answer	Total
B-12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cocaine	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	6
Methadone	0	2	1	0	1	16	0	20
Ecstasy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Heroin	4	24	2	3	14	70	1	118
Insulin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meth	1	0	1	0	2	17	3	24
Opiates	0	0	1	1	6	7	0	15
Prescription Drugs	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	6
Speed	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Hormones	24	45	34	23	4	377	6	513
Unknown	1	1	0	0	3	9	4	18
<b>Total</b>	31	74	41	27	31	501	16	721

As with clients organized by ethnicity, heroin usage also increased in almost all gender identity categories. For transgender females, the number of exchanges for heroin stayed the same so the percentage dropped. The percentage of total exchanges for heroin by cisgender female clients increased

from 2.76% in 2010 to 4.02% in 2011. The increase for transgender males was .5% to 2.9% while the increase for cisgender males was 5.26% to 8.73%. 2011 also saw an increase in transgender male clients exchanging syringes for opiates, while exchanges for opiates by cisgender men dropped to 0%. The percentages of methamphetamine usage among cisgender men and women also decreased. Finally, as in 2010, the syringe exchange served more cisgender males than transgender females again in 2011.

<b>2011 Drug of Choice and Gender</b>							
<b>Drug of Choice</b>	<b>Gender</b>						<b>Total</b>
	Transgender Female	Female	Transgender Male	Male	Gender-non-conforming	No Answer	
B-12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cocaine	0	2	0	4	0	0	6
Methadone	0	1	0	19	0	0	20
Ecstasy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Heroin	3	29	21	63	0	2	118
Insulin	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Meth	1	8	0	15	0	0	24
Opiates	0	2	13	0	0	0	15
Prescription Drugs	0	3	1	1	1	0	6
Speed	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hormones	73	21	307	101	8	3	513
Unknown	0	3	1	10	0	4	18
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>721</b>

## Recommendations

In the course of a year, the syringe exchange was able to almost double the number of client exchanges that occurred. After observing trends between the two years, several recommendations can be made. Of some concern is the dramatic increase in heroin usage across the board from 2010 to 2011. This may be indicative of a trend in the broader Twin Cities community, or perhaps a sign that the syringe exchange is reaching a broader clientele. Regardless, ensuring that education about safe syringe usage reaches all clients should include information on harm reduction for heroin users.

While the data collection procedures have changed slightly since 2010 to collect more information from clients, more accurate data collection could help differentiate between individual clients, helping track how frequently clients return to the syringe exchange. Additionally, indicating when a client is new to the syringe exchange could help differentiate between new and returning clients. Particularly, having a more accurate count of returning clients could reveal if there are any differences between ethnicities for how frequently clients return.

During 2011 the syringe exchange started collecting information on which zip code clients reside in, which could give a clearer picture of where in the five-county metropolitan area clients live. This may also give some indication of the general socioeconomic status of clients.

In 2010 clients returned syringes at a much higher rate than in 2011. A concentrated drive to encourage clients to return their syringes would benefit the syringe exchange, helping to get closer to equal numbers of used syringes collected and new syringes distributed.

In both 2010 and 2011, the syringe exchange served cisgender men at a higher rate than transgender women. While transgender women sometimes use non-injection methods of taking their hormones, the discrepancy between the number of transgender men and transgender women using the syringe exchange seems problematic. Outreach for the syringe exchange could focus specifically on transgender women, the syringe exchange could recruit more transgender women as volunteers as well.



Overall, this research gives a preliminary snapshot of the general trends of syringe usage by clients. A more in-depth study, potentially using focus groups or interviews, could give a more holistic view of drug use in the transgender and gender-non-conforming communities. Additionally, focus groups or interviews could also help determine how the discrepancy between the percentages of transgender male and female clients can best be alleviated. Such research combined with the results from this analysis would allow MTHC to continue to tailor its programming to meet the health needs of the entire transgender and gender-non-conforming community.

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