



# Successful Model for Pharmacy Driven Harm Reduction Services to Link Veterans Who Inject Drugs Into Care



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## INTRODUCTION

- Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) were introduced in the 1980's to reduce human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmission among people who inject drugs. They have since become an internationally recognized harm reduction practice standard.

- Per the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics:



7% of Veterans struggle with illegal drug use

80% of Veterans with substance use disorders struggle with alcohol

59,000 Veterans use heroin

- The Orlando VA Healthcare System (OVAHCS) SSP provides Veterans with:



- Sterile syringes and supplies
- Substance use disorder and mental health services
- Testing and vaccinations
- Fentanyl detection test strips
- HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

## OBJECTIVES

- To identify and engage Veterans who inject drugs in an effort to increase the utilization of our local SSP.
- To assess staff perceptions and knowledge regarding SSPs
- To develop and implement in-service education sessions regarding SSPs
- To reduce healthcare gaps in the local community through promotion of harm reduction programs offered at the OVAHCS.

## METHODS

Figure 1. OVAHCS Process Map

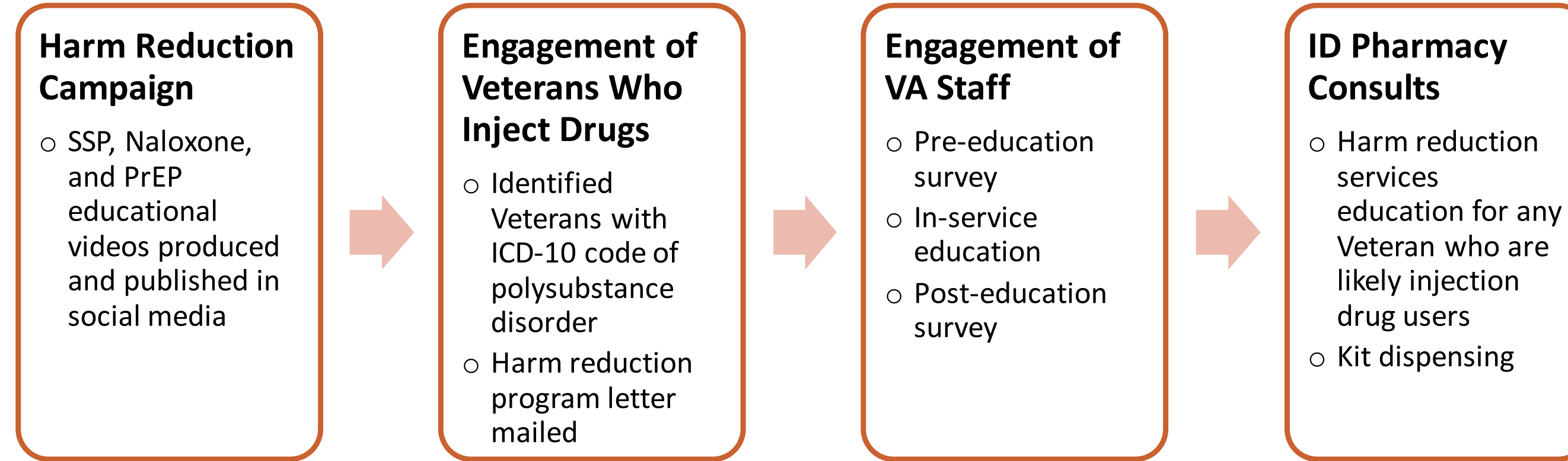


Figure 2. Mailed Harm Reduction Letter

The Orlando VA Healthcare System (OVAHCS) is committed to ensuring our Veterans are aware of the harm reduction services we provide. Did you know Orlando VA Healthcare System offers sterile needles and syringes for free?

Our program, RISAE (Resist Infection through Syringe Service and Safe Sex Education) is committed to reducing infections such as HIV, viral hepatitis, blood stream, heart valve and skin infections.

Our Infectious Diseases (ID) Clinic at Lake Nona (2G) also offers HIV/Hepatitis/STI Screenings, HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), Vaccinations, and referrals for substance use disorders.

If you or a Veteran you know injects drugs please stop by 2G or call our ID Social Worker at (407) 631-2267. She can provide more details or have an ID pharmacist or doctor call you back.

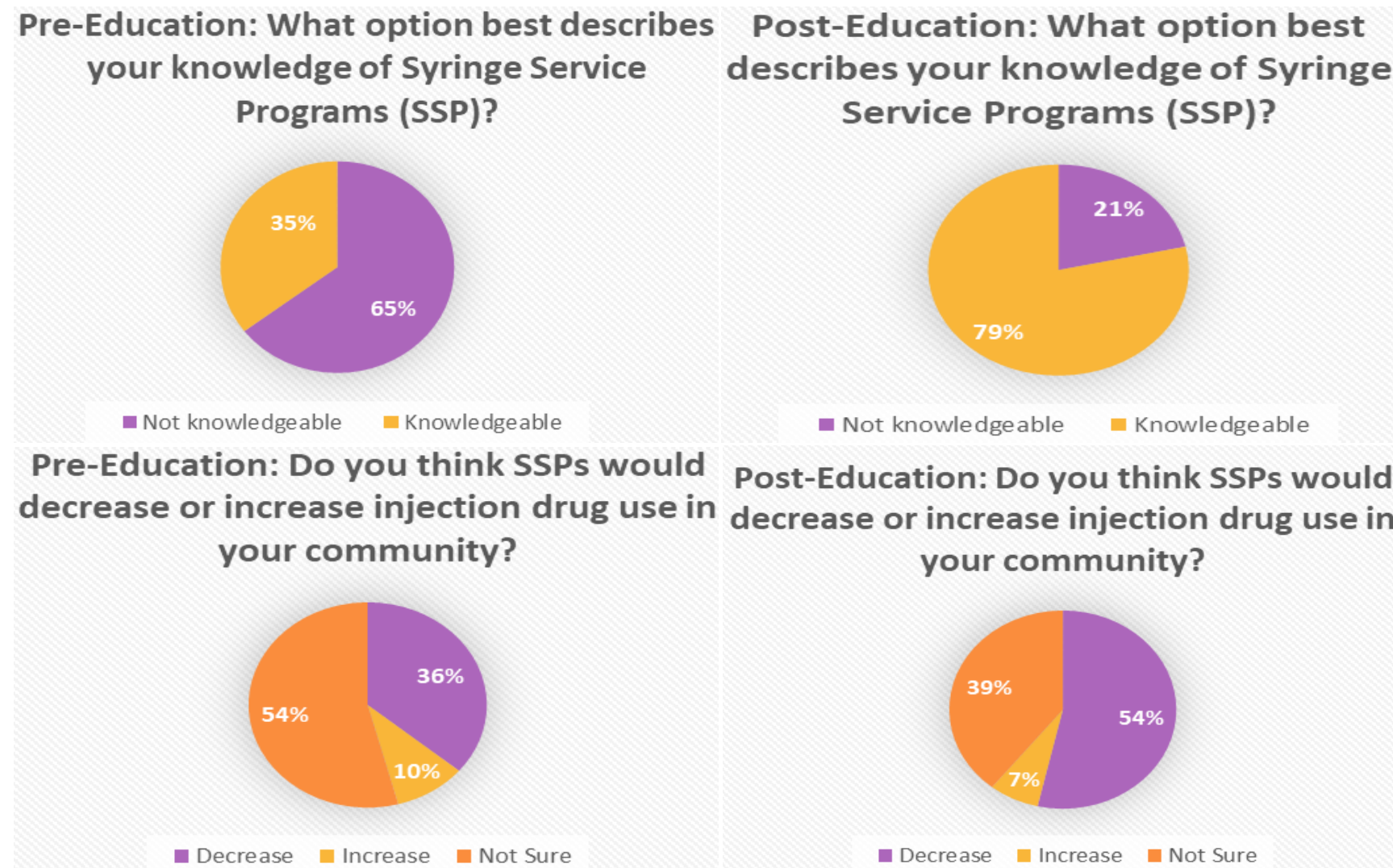
The Center for Disease Control and Prevention has studied SSPs for more than 30 years and has found multiple community benefits such as lowering deaths from overdoses, reducing HIV transmissions, and increasing vaccinations/testing. Join RISAE's movement to reduce infectious diseases that can be prevented. Previous and current Presidential administrations support syringe service programs. Participation in syringe programs is encouraged and does not affect Veteran benefits. Scan the barcode below with your smart device and learn more about our syringe service program! Thank you for your service!

View the SSP Harm Reduction video by scanning the barcode below!



## RESULTS

Figure 3. Employee Survey Results



### Pre-Education Employee Remarks:

- "I will not be an enabler"
- "I worked drug and alcohol for 10 years at a VA up north. I believe we should get them clean and sober not help them continue using"
- "This is a great idea to connect to Veterans that has this issue. Thanks for all your efforts. "

Figure 4. SSP Patient Utilization (9/1/2020 - 7/12/2022)

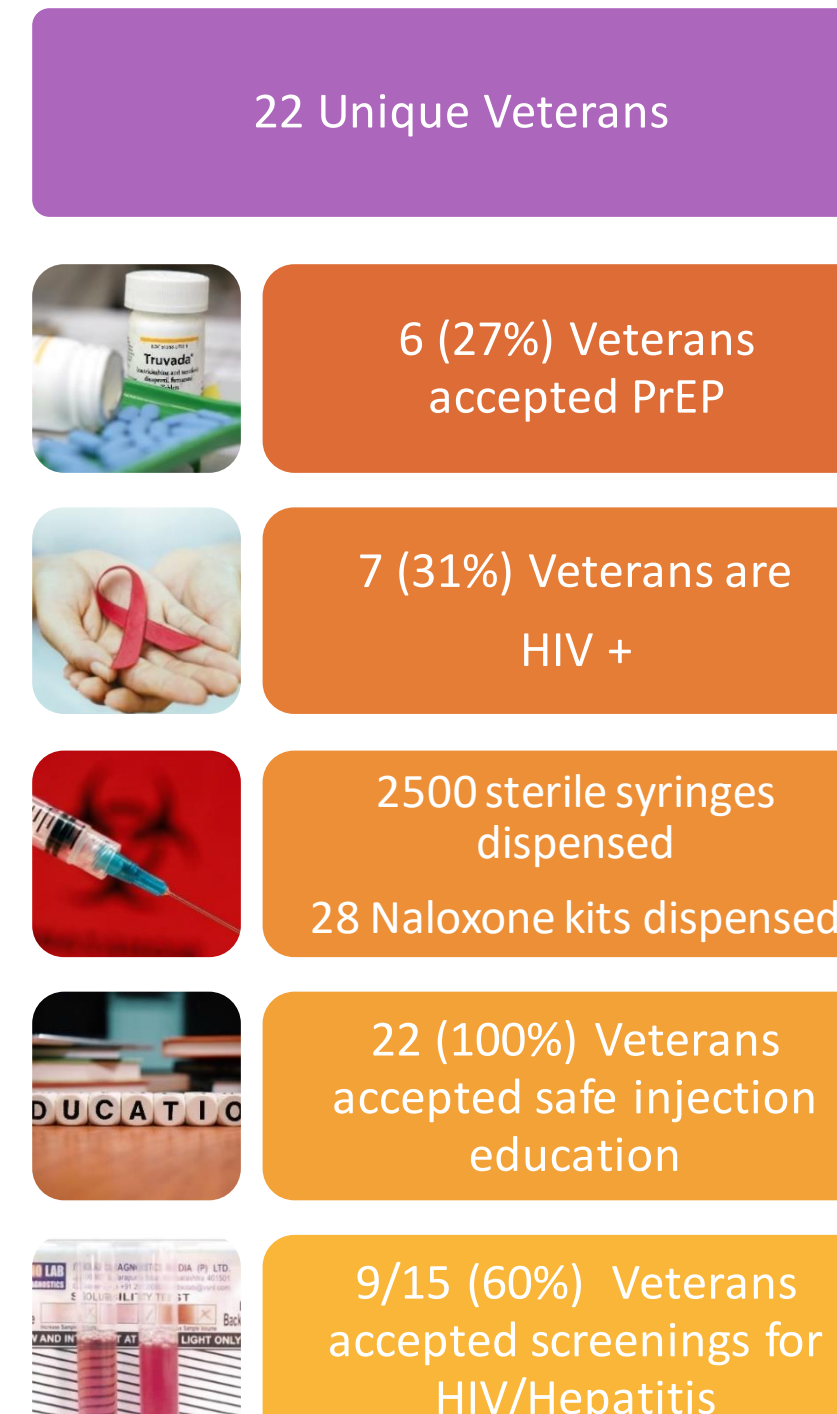
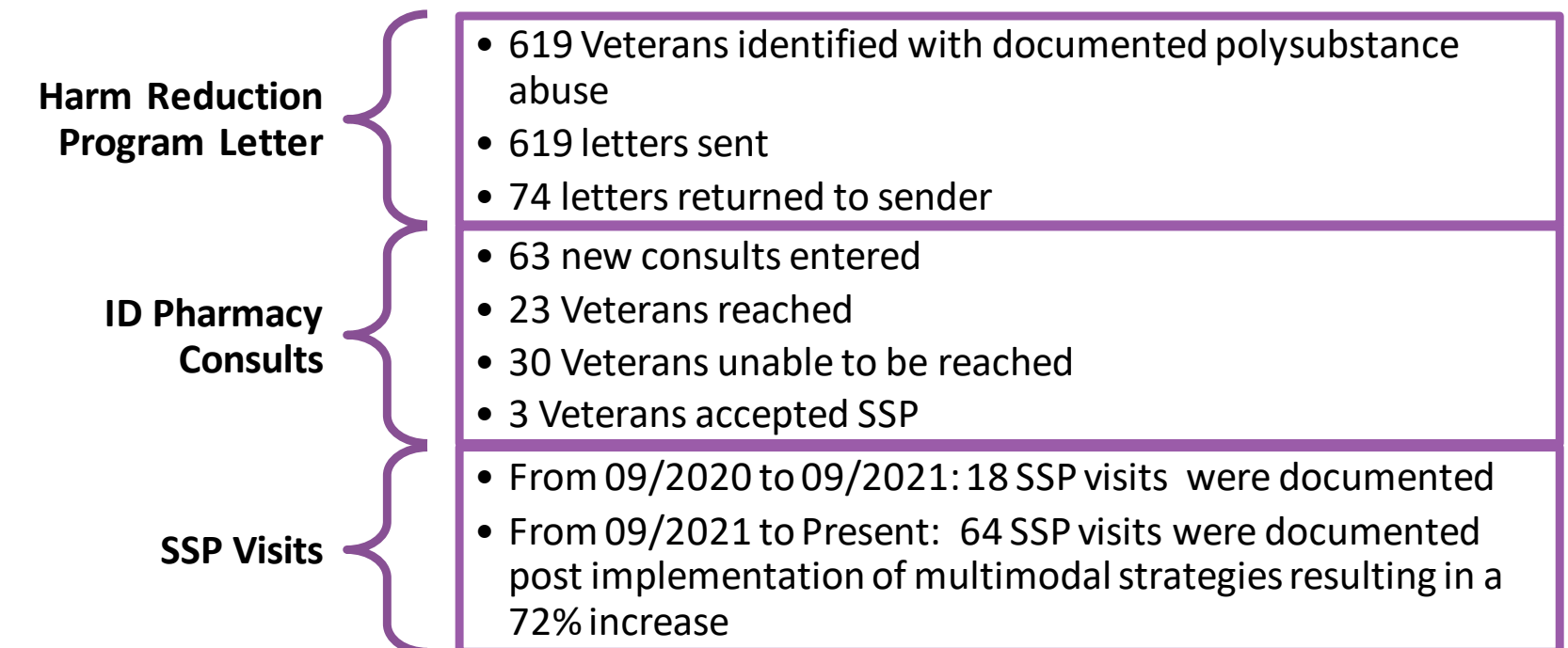


Figure 5. Harm Reduction Letter and ID Consult Results



## CONCLUSION

- The implementation of multimodal strategies to engage Veterans and VA staff has resulted in an increase of SSP utilization. However, as demonstrated in the literature, additional innovated methods are needed to identify and engage this difficult to reach population.
- The steps already taken can serve as a model for programs currently in development and moves us closer to ending the HIV epidemic by 2030.
- The OVAHCS SSP is committed to linking Veterans to harm reduction tools to help combat the rise in injection-drug-related infections and overdoses.