

Audit at a glance



Syringe Access and Sharps Disposal Programs

AUGUST 2020

ABOUT | The City and County of Denver's syringe access and sharps disposal programs seek to reduce harm for people who use drugs and to reduce harm for the community at large by providing access to sterile injection equipment and safe disposal options.

In Denver, the Community and Behavioral Health Division of the Department of Public Health and Environment oversees most of the city's substance and opioid misuse prevention and treatment programs — such as the syringe access and sharps disposal programs. This primarily involves administering contracts with community providers.

In the report

FINDING: The Department of Public Health and Environment Could Better Manage Its Syringe Access and Sharps Disposal Programs, and It Could Better Assess whether the Programs Are Effective in Reducing Harm

- We found the Department of Public Health and Environment could improve existing strategies for data management and program evaluation — particularly regarding needs assessment, data collection, periodic evaluation, and documentation of evaluation results used to inform its decision-making.
- We developed an example mapping analysis using city datasets that revealed many syringe access and sharps disposal services are in the highest areas of reported activity near downtown; however, there are also areas of potential unmet need. For example, the Stapleton area and some western neighborhoods in Denver show moderate levels of reported activity with no syringe access locations or sharps disposal kiosks nearby. Additionally, the one syringe access program east of downtown is not in the East Colfax neighborhood that has high reported activity.
- We also found:
 - Public Health and Environment does not effectively coordinate with its syringe access providers to assess the success of the program in reducing harm for people who use drugs or inject substances.
 - The department needs to conduct and document process and outcome evaluations to inform program decisions, and it missed opportunities to coordinate with stakeholders to improve program and evaluation activities.
 - Although we acknowledge the impact COVID-19 has had on the department's priorities and resources since March 2020, we found that preexisting issues with management priorities, undocumented processes, and organizational structure present challenges to the department's ability to effectively manage data and evaluation activities.
 - For example, the department takes a decentralized approach to contract management. Four different divisions within Public Health

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Syringe Access

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- and Environment support and monitor different aspects of the syringe access and sharps disposal programs.
- The department needs to strengthen oversight of its contracts with syringe access providers, and it needs to improve its collaboration with the providers — which leading practices say is key to the success of any syringe access program.
 - The department should also assess the continued relevancy of the city ordinance that authorizes the syringe access program. Our analysis found the ordinance is outdated and too restrictive. HSS' policies and procedures.

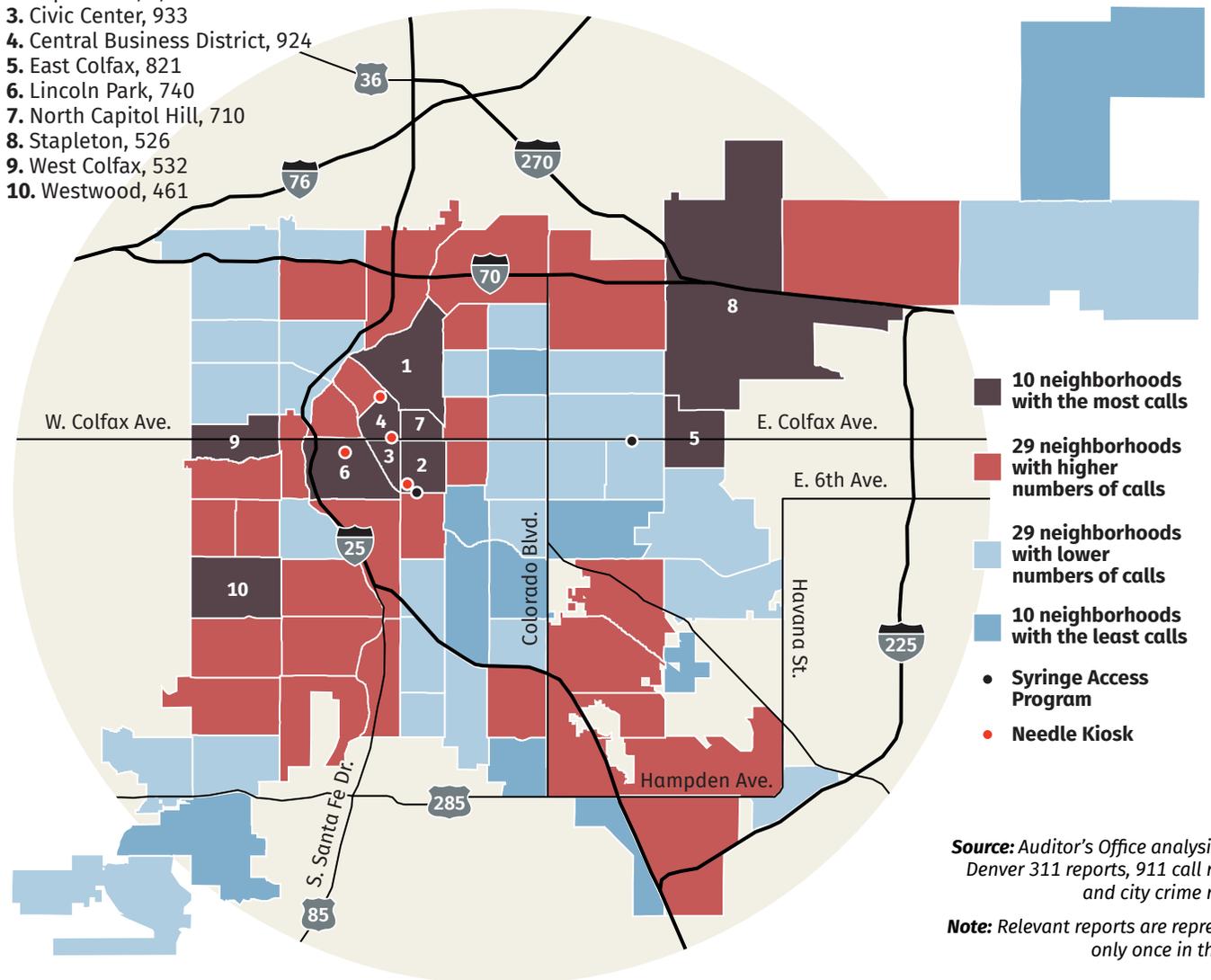
We concluded Denver's Department of Public Health and Environment should take steps to improve its program management practices, and it should assess the syringe access and sharps disposal programs to determine the extent to which the people who need these services are actually receiving them.

Total Reports for Drug Use, Sales, Overdose, and Needles and Sharps in the City and County of Denver, 2016-2019

Top 10 neighborhoods ranked by most reports:

Jan. 1, 2016 through Dec. 31, 2019

1. Five Points, 1,705
2. Capitol Hill, 1,475
3. Civic Center, 933
4. Central Business District, 924
5. East Colfax, 821
6. Lincoln Park, 740
7. North Capitol Hill, 710
8. Stapleton, 526
9. West Colfax, 532
10. Westwood, 461



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