

Harm Reduction Coalition Policy Update

H A R M R E D U C T I O N C O A L I T I O N F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 9

SPECIAL FEDERAL EDITION

A new administration and a new Congress promise new opportunities for harm reduction advocates. This inaugural edition of the Harm Reduction Coalition Policy Update will map out some of the possibilities.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Federal Ban on Syringe Exchange	2
Harm Reduction In the News	2

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

The Harm Reduction Coalition Policy Update is a monthly e-newsletter. Future issues will cover a range of harm reduction topics, including syringe access, HIV and hepatitis C, overdose, and buprenorphine, and developments on the local, state, national, and global levels.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION

Sign of the times: “The President also supports lifting the federal ban on needle exchange, which could dramatically reduce rates of infection among drug users.”— posted on the White House website (http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/civil_rights/) as soon as President Obama was sworn in to office.

Officials and key staff in federal agencies charged with tackling drug user health issues have for years kept harm reduction at arms length, with issues such as syringe exchange treated as politically radioactive. The Obama administration offers hope that harm reduction will finally have a place in the policies and priorities of federal government, after years of dismissal, silence, distortion, and suppression.

At this time, permanent appointments to key posts – the directors for the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), and the ONDCP (Office of National

Drug Control Policy), and the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator – have not been announced.



PRESIDENT BARAK OBAMA

An early rumor that the Obama transition team was considering former Congressman James Ramstad (R, MN) for ONDCP Director (commonly known as the “Drug Czar”) sparked a petition drafted by Dr. Andrew Tatarsky of Harm Reduction Psychotherapy and Training Associates challenging Ramstad’s qualifications based on factors including his voting record against syringe exchange. The petition (<http://www.andrewtatarsky.com/phpPETITION/index.html>) has been signed by over 450 substance abuse and mental health treatment professionals to date.

For now, ONDCP counsel Edward Jurith has been named

interim director. Of particular concern to harm reduction advocates is a letter (<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A06E4D9113CF93AA35753C1A9679C8B63&scp=1&sq=harm%20reduction%20is%20deceptive&scse>) that he wrote to the New York Times, published October 9, 2001, when he was last acting ONDCP director under the Bush administration, in response to an article on DanceSafe (<http://www.dancesafe.org/>):

“Harm reduction’ is a political movement, not sound policy based on science. Far from reducing harm, its advocates promote policies that lead to increased usage rates and a false sense of security for Ecstasy users.

“Research, not rhetoric, should be used to educate potential drug users. So-called harm reduction programs only obfuscate the truth: Ecstasy has been proven to cause long-term brain damage resulting in memory loss, depression, paranoia and confusion.

“At best, harm reduction is an

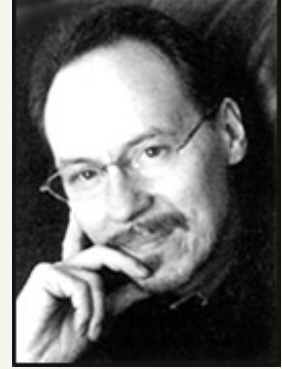
Continue from front page, The Obama Administration

approach that concedes drug abuse prevention is impossible. Pretending harmful activity will be reduced if it is passively condoned is irresponsible.

“Increasing help for those dependent on drugs is better than decreasing harm”

HRC will continue to monitor these appointments and de-

mand that officials in key roles at federal agencies and offices demonstrate an understanding of the role and value of harm reduction, a respect for science and evidence in guiding policy, and a commitment to rejecting the previous administration’s politicization of harm reduction.



Dr. Andrew Tatarsky

FEDERAL BAN ON SYRINGE EXCHANGE

Momentum continues to increase towards lifting the ban prohibiting the use of federal funds for syringe exchange. Rep. Jose Serrano (D, NY) has reintroduced The Community AIDS and Hepatitis Prevention Act (H.R. 179), which would eliminate all restrictions on use of federal funding for syringe exchange. The bill currently

has 39 cosponsors, listed here (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:HR00179:@@P>).

HRC is asking everyone to contact your member of Congress and urge them to cosponsor the bill. Take action here (http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1627/t/100/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=25278).

http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1627/t/100/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=25278).

HRC is also leading a grassroots campaign to lift the ban, and seeking coordinators in every state. If you're interested in spending a few hours a week volunteering, contact Hilary McQuie at (510) 444-6969 or mcquie@harmreduction.org

later in February, and work to make sure that language extending the ban is removed from the annual spending bills (known as Appropriations). Background materials and advocacy documents are available on HRC’s website here (<http://www.harmreduction.org/article.php?id=766>)

HARM REDUCTION IN THE NEWS



Allan Clear

HRC’s Executive Director Allan Clear has been blogging about harm reduction policy and the Obama administration at AlterNet and the Huffington Post

Obama’s HIV Fix: Syringe Exchange Is a Major Component (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/allan-clear/obamas-hiv-fix-syringe-ex_b_158799.html)

(posted January 17, 2009)

Obama’s Choice: Sane U.N. Drug Policy or the Same Old Failed War-on-Drugs Routine? (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/allan-clear/obamas-choice-sane-un-dru_b_161277.html)

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

For current action alerts and additional resources and information, visit our website at

<http://www.harmreduction.org/index.php> or contact us at (212) 213-6376 (New York office) or (510) 444-6969 (California office), or email us at hrc@harmreduction.org.