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Research Update: Youth who use drugs who cannot access addiction treatment are twice as likely to start injecting

By [Logan Broeckaert](#)

A Vancouver study¹ investigated the relationship between the accessibility of addiction treatment and the initiation of injection drug use among at-risk youth. This study found that youth who used drugs—cocaine, crack, heroin or methamphetamines— but who had never injected were twice as likely to start injecting after being unable to access addiction treatment.

The findings are from a cohort study of street-involved youth (aged 14–26) in Vancouver who had used drugs in the past 30 days. Participants had to have never injected drugs at study enrollment and to have at least one follow-up visit to be included in this study. Between September 2005 and May 2014, 462 participants met these criteria. Over the course of the study:

- 21% of participants disclosed that they had injected drugs for the first time (97 participants)
- 28% of participants disclosed that they had tried but were unable to access addiction treatment (129 participants)

Of the participants who were unable to access addiction treatment, 41% tried to access detox services, 35% treatment centres, 10% recovery houses, and 4% counsellors. Waiting lists were the most frequent barrier to treatment (66%); 18% of participants cited logistical barriers including location, hours and documentation requirements as barriers; and 6% for behavioural issues. Nine percent of participants were rejected by treatment programs for unspecified reasons.

The results of this study suggest that reducing barriers to treatment for youth who use drugs but who have never injected may reduce the likelihood that they will transition to injection drug use. This will avoid missed opportunities to prevent injection initiation and help to reduce drug-related harms like overdose and infection with HIV and hepatitis C.

Reference

1. DeBeck K, Kerr T, Nolan S, et al. Inability to access addiction treatment predicts injection initiation among street-involved youth in a Canadian setting. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* . 2016 Dec;11(1). Available from: <http://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-015-0046-x>

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