

## City's Methadone Clinics Plagued With Problems, New Report Says

By Graham Rayman

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The state funded methadone clinics in New York City are poorly managed, inadequately equipped, and don't provide necessary services to keep recovering addicts from relapsing, [according to a new report released today](#). The report also discloses a campaign of police harassment outside the clinics.

New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services oversee a network of clinics, known formally as Opioid Treatment Programs, which are run by private non-profits under government contract. In all, about 30,000 city residents use the clinics.

Based on surveys of 500 clinic users, the report "Beyond Methadone" concludes that many said they never received instructions on how to prevent overdoses, even though accidental overdose in a leading cause of emergency room visits. Nor did they receive screening for the Hepatitis C virus, which is often transferred via shared needles, nor were they given information about alternate forms of treatment for the addiction.

The clients also said they supported the availability of clean syringes which none of the clinics currently provide. Bureaucratic problems, the report says, led to missed appointments, prematurely closed files, and breakdowns in transportation help. Those problems can cause a gap in treatment which leads to a relapse.

Meanwhile, they weren't properly informed of their rights, or how to file a grievance and experienced a general indifference from the clinic staff on those complaints.

The survey also reports that police officers frequently hang around methadone clinics and harass clients. At times, and we have heard this from defense lawyers, too, even arrest them in questionable stings for trading away or selling their methadone.

"Police will stake out places on Saturday mornings when people get their take home dose for Sundays, and use confidential informants faking withdrawal symptoms to set people up for arrest," says Sean Barry, of VOCAL-NY, one of the groups which sponsored the report. "Methadone is highly regulated, but it's not a drug that's abused. People are most likely to seek methadone from someone else if they missed a dose, not to get high."

One of the anonymous survey respondents added, "If they need a spot to meet their quotas, they just come to the methadone program and mess with people."

And they complain about a web of regulations, which forces them to visit clinics for their daily methadone dose, rather than being provided a prescription over time.

Some three-quarters of those surveyed said they knew someone who was using drugs and/or alcohol while in methadone treatment.

The report, "Beyond Methadone," was produced by VOCAL-NY, an advocacy group and Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center.

The three largest methadone clinic operators are Beth Israel, Narco Freedom and the Addiction Research and Treatment Corp.