

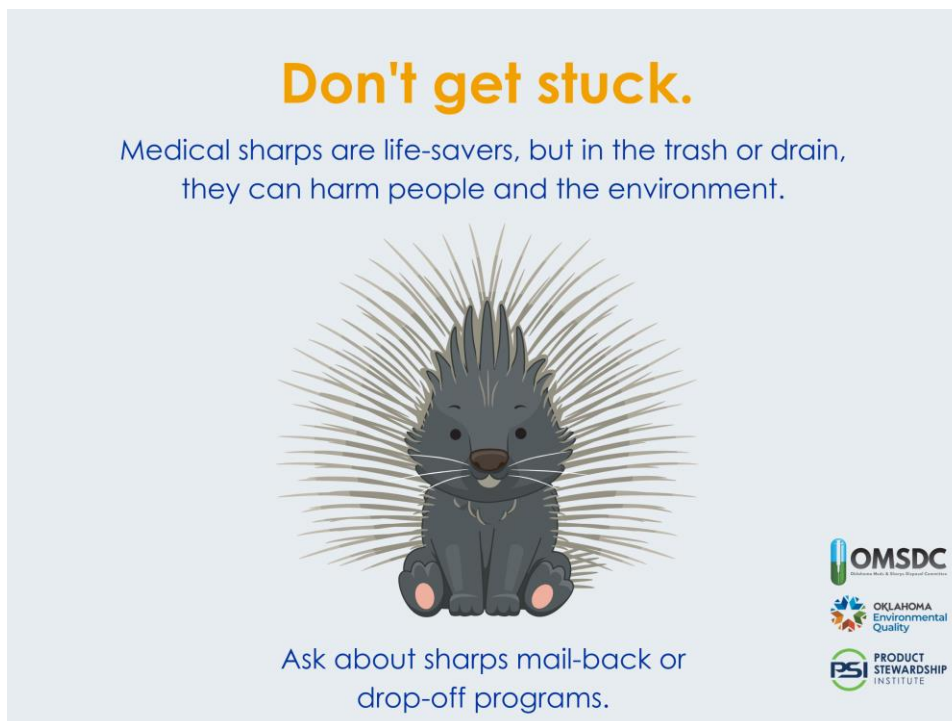


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**Contact:** Rachel Lincoln Sarnoff, Marketing and Communications Director, Product Stewardship Institute, [rachel@productstewardship.us](mailto:rachel@productstewardship.us) or 617-236-4866

## OKLAHOMA LAUNCHES SHARPS TAKE-BACK

*“Don’t Get Stuck” educates consumers on responsible medical sharps disposal*



**Oklahoma City, OK —**

Medical sharps, such as needles and syringes, are convenient devices used by millions to safely self-inject medications outside of health-care settings, often to treat conditions like diabetes. More than 100,000 residents in Oklahoma are prescribed self-injecting medications, generating as many as 60 million needles per year.

When needles are flushed or trashed, they pose grave health and safety risks to residents, sanitation workers, sewage treatment plant operators, waste management personnel, and hospitality workers. A 2018 survey showed that 53% of materials recovery facilities observed needles in household waste at least weekly; over half reported one or more needle-stick injury in 2016.

That’s why The Choctaw Nation, Indian Health Services, and Covanta Environmental Solutions partnered with the Product Stewardship Institute, a policy advocate and consulting nonprofit that pioneered product stewardship in the United States, to expand sharps take-back infrastructure in Oklahoma. Through the program, participating health clinics in eight areas provide sharps users with easy-to-use

containers that allow them to drop off or mail in their used sharps, protecting people and the environment.

“The implementation of a sharps mail-back program in Oklahoma is a big step forward in helping remove this material from households,” said Brad Wright, Vice President and General Manager of Healthcare Solutions at Covanta. “This grant will ensure that the public will have access to disposal containers which will then be managed and processed in the most sustainable manner possible.”

This collection program is informed by PSI’s how-to guide: *Establishing Community Medical Sharps Programs: A Guide for Municipalities, Pharmacies, Health Clinics, and Nonprofits in Oklahoma*. The guide, created with grant funding from DEQ, provides step-by-step support for municipalities establishing medical sharps collection programs for residents and will be expanded with lessons learned from the pilot collection programs. Research for the guide highlighted the lack of infrastructure for medical sharps collection and led to this pilot program.

"In addition to the public health and environmental risks, medical sharps that are thrown in the trash can pose a safety hazard to sanitation workers," said Patrick Riley, environmental programs manager for solid waste and sustainability at the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). "We know that safe collection sites are needed, and this program will demonstrate exactly how they can be operated."

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2021, the Oklahoma State Legislature legalized privately funded programs to capture used sharps. Some hospitals and medical clinics now accept sharps from their patients, as do a limited number of businesses, following OSHA regulations. In addition, some cities have developed occasional, annual, or ongoing sharps take-back events. And, according to Oklahoma state law, residents are permitted to place medical sharps in the trash if they are sealed in a rigid plastic container. But many don't follow this practice: There is still a need for safe, affordable disposal options provided by safe and convenient sharps collection programs.

Oklahoma's new program is part of a nationwide push for healthcare Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programs and legislation. In April, Illinois became the eighth U.S. state – with Maine, Oregon, Massachusetts, Washington State, New York, Vermont, and California – to enact an [EPR law that requires drug manufacturers to pay for and run a statewide take-back program](#).

PSI has been working for 15 years on pharmaceuticals take-back laws and policies, including developing model drug take-back legislation and leading the national effort to enact the Secure and Responsible Drug Disposal Act in 2010, which made it possible for pharmacies to accept unused drugs.

### **Product Stewardship Institute (PSI)**

PSI is a policy advocate and consulting nonprofit that pioneered product stewardship in the United States. Since 2000, PSI has helped enact 130 extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws across 16 product categories in 33 states — the bedrock of the circular economy. We work with governments, academia, nonprofits, and business to ensure that products are responsibly managed from design to end of life. Join us at [www.productstewardship.us](http://www.productstewardship.us).

### **Oklahoma Meds and Sharps Disposal Committee (OMSDC)**

The OMSDC is a coalition of professionals working on a statewide solution for the safe disposal of medical sharps and leftover pharmaceuticals for Oklahoma residents. Funded by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality with facilitation and technical support from the Product Stewardship Institute, the committee meets periodically to share information and to develop solutions. <https://tinyurl.com/okmeds>

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