

City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2025 #228
IN CITY COUNCIL
September 15, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please find attached response to Awaiting Report Item Number 25-45, regarding the siting of needle drop boxes and Naloxone boxes in high priority locations throughout the city.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager





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Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

September 15, 2025

To the Honorable, the Housing Committee:

In response to AR 25-45 regarding the siting of needle drop boxes and Naloxone boxes in high priority locations throughout the city, we report the following:

The proper disposal of needles and access to Naloxone are key safety considerations that city staff across multiple departments are involved in including the Health Department, Department of Human Services, Community Safety, Fire Department, Emergency Communications and Public Works. While this report focuses on the city's efforts to provide and expand options for needle disposal and increase access to Naloxone, it is important to recognize the extensive efforts that Public Health, DHSP, Community Safety and the Police Department undertake every day to support our unhoused residents, providing case management, support, and connecting residents with treatment and shelter options when they are ready.

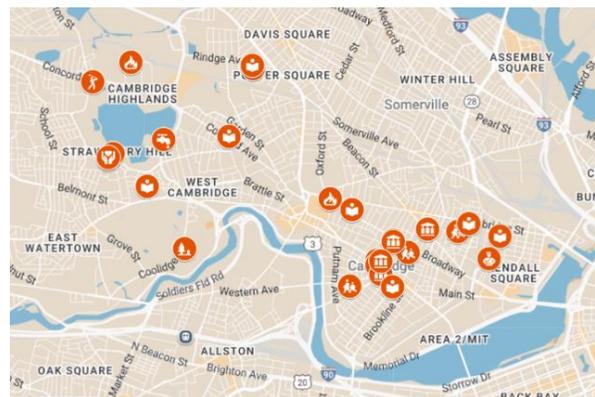
The report below summarizes the city efforts to address the proper disposal of needles and supply Naloxone to the public. Based on a review of the data on the volume of needles being collected at the needle boxes and the high priority locations, we will **be placing 4 additional boxes** at the bus turnaround on Rindge Avenue, Alewife MBTA station, Danehy Park (New Street parking lot), and Harvard Square. Public Health will continue **prioritizing the distribution of Naloxone** through their public events, overdose prevention training and through the Care Team. Additionally, Public Health will be **piloting a public health vending machine** that will dispense free Naloxone, other harm reduction materials, and other public health-related goods.

Naloxone Boxes – How can residents access Naloxone?

The Cambridge Public Health Department offers **free monthly sessions on education and training on Naloxone** (also known as Narcan) administration. Narcan is a nasal spray that can rapidly reverse an opioid overdoses. It works in 1-3 minutes and is active for 30-90 minutes.

The City has AED (automated external defibrillator) cabinets in **public buildings that have Naloxone** for anyone to use in case of emergency (see the map to the right for locations). These boxes are helpful in the case of an emergency, but have not been particularly well utilized.

Naloxone can be purchased at CVS, Walgreens, and other local pharmacies, but our **most**

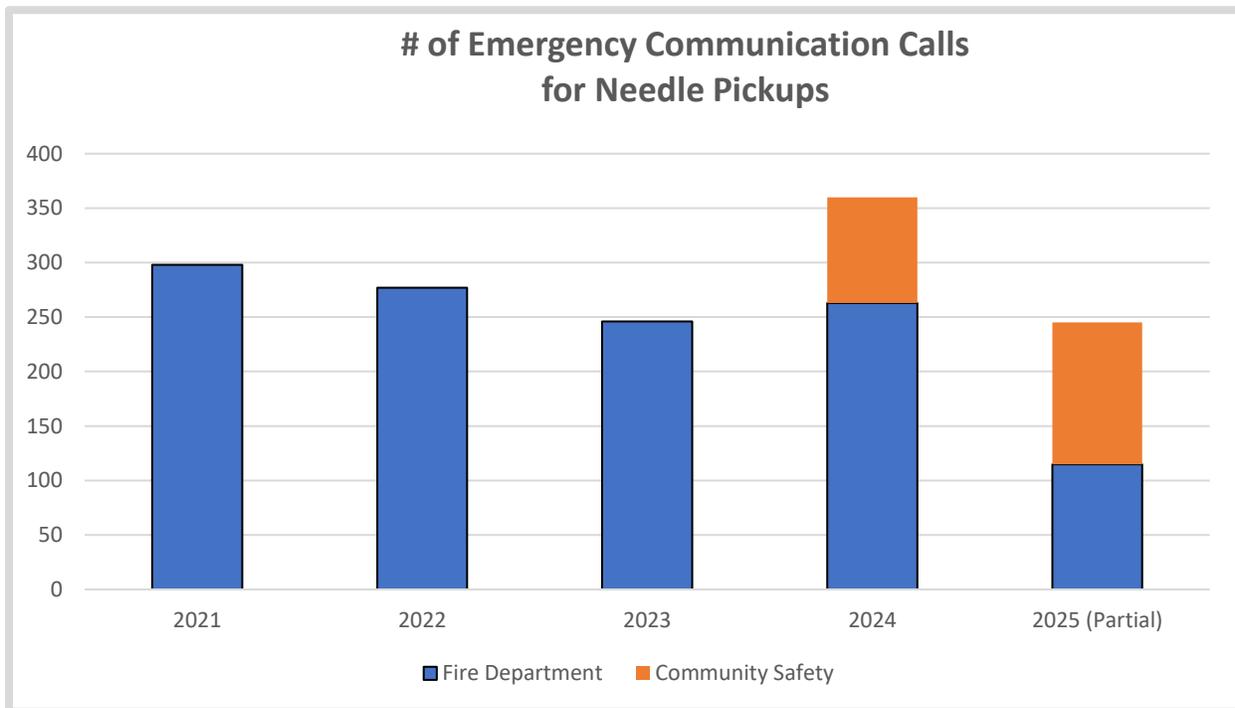


effective means of getting Naloxone out into the community has been through the Public Health Department’s **free overdose prevention training** sessions, at **free distribution events** and through the **Care Team at Community Safety**. Through these efforts, the city has distributed **1,782 boxes (or 3,564 doses)** of Naloxone to members of the Cambridge community (between January 2023 and August 2025). **Requests for Naloxone** can be made directly to (**dmcpeak@cambridgepublichealth.org / 617-665-3872**) and information about the overdose prevention training is available at www.cambridgepublichealth.org/services/overdoes-prevention

In addition to these distribution efforts, Public Health is working to deploy a **public health vending machine** that would dispense free Naloxone, other harm reduction materials, and other public health-related goods. This would be run as a pilot program with one machine, with the potential to expand to additional machines after the pilot is evaluated. The machine would be placed outdoors with 24/7 access. The goal is to make Naloxone and other supplies available even when other programs are closed or otherwise inaccessible for any reason. An exact location has not yet been determined, but that will be discussed further with the Substance Use Advisory Committee.

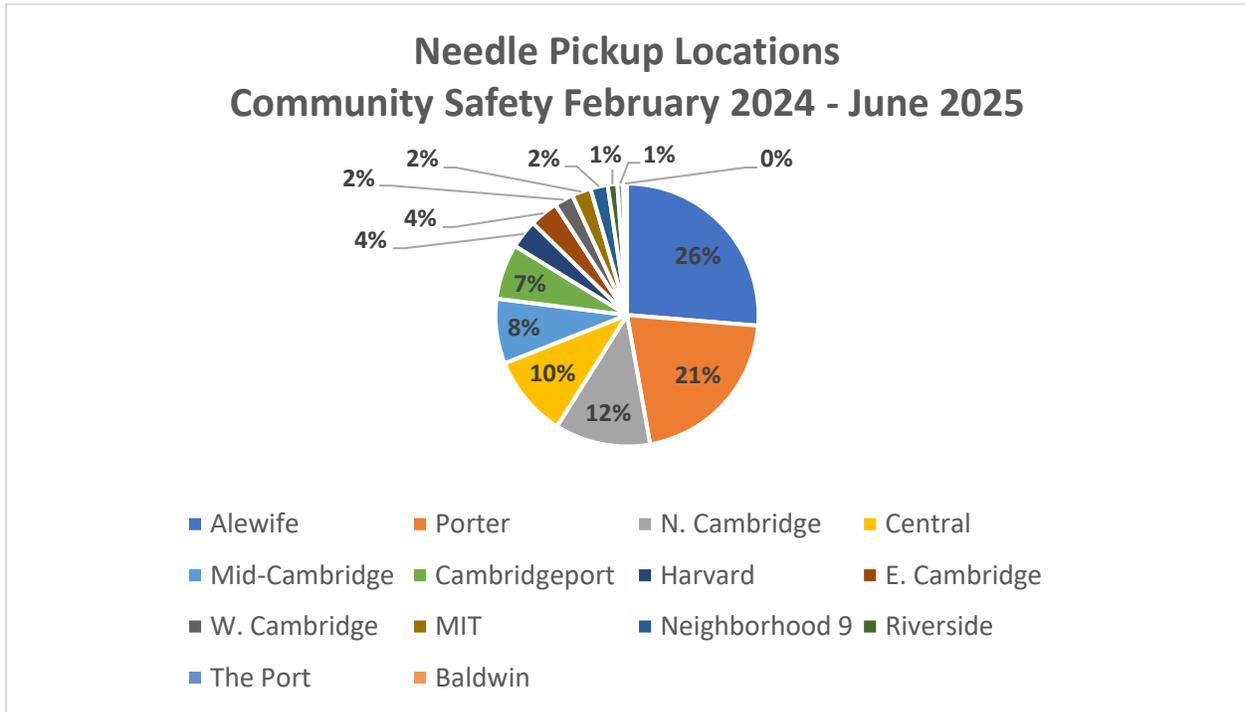
Calls for Service to Address Needles

Improperly disposed of needles is a public safety issue and residents are encouraged to contact Emergency Communications Center (ECC) through the **non-emergency line at 617-349-3300 to report sightings** of needles. ECC operators will dispatch the appropriate staff to pickup and properly dispose of the needles.



The primary responders to these types of calls are the Fire Department and the Community Safety Department. The chart above shows the number of calls for needle pickup, the breakdown of those calls being serviced by Community Safety and the Fire Department and high volume locations.

A breakdown of the locations of the needle pickups shows significant requests for service across the city, and highlights activity in the Alewife and North Cambridge areas.



In addition to these efforts, the Central Square BID picks up needles in Central Square, around 1,300 per month. Since these are picked up by their ambassadors, without going through ECC, these are not counted in the data above.

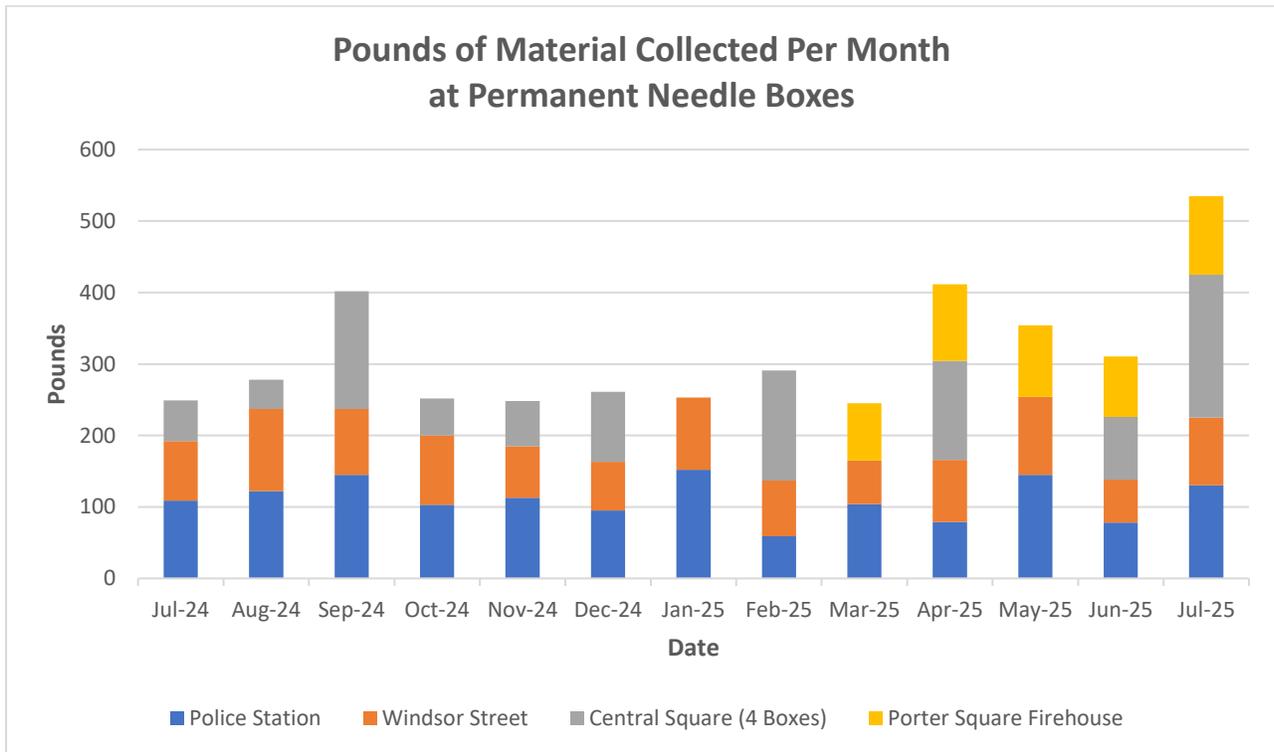
Permanent Needle Boxes As of August 2025, the City has **7 permanent needle boxes** in place, 3 overseen by Public Health and 4 managed by the Central Square BID. These boxes provide an important service to the community; providing safe disposal of sharps from medical use (including insulin and other prescription medicine), acupuncture waste, and needles associated with drug use.

- Public Health Department at 119 Windsor St
- Police Station at 125 Sixth St
- Porter Square Fire Station at 2029 Massachusetts Ave
- Central Square Locations (4)
 - Central Square Fire Station at 378 Massachusetts Ave
 - Police Reporting Station at 628 Massachusetts Ave
 - City Hall at 795 Massachusetts Ave (Inman Square side)
 - City Parking Lot 8 at 375 Green St

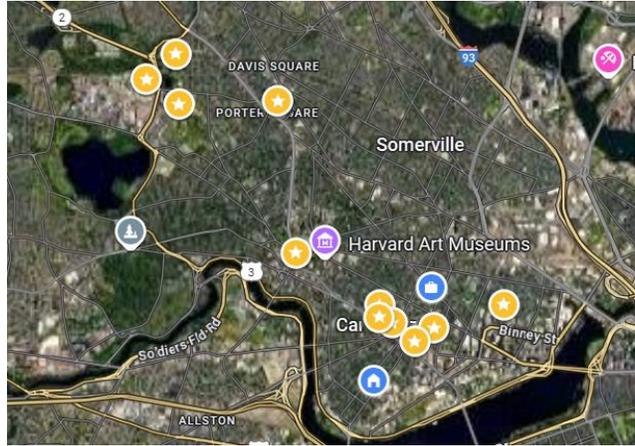


The existing locations have been focused on the eastern portion of the city, with the Porter Square location recently being added.

The material collected in the boxes is measured before it is disposed and indicate that the boxes, including the most recently installed one at the Porter Square Fire Station, are well utilized.



Based on a review of the data, staff have identified 4 **additional locations for permanent needle boxes to provide better coverage across the city**. In September, Public Health and DPW will install a new box at the bus turnaround at Russell Field to help address the increased activity in the Alewife area. Public Health will be ordering an additional 3 boxes to be placed at the Alewife MBTA Station (Steele Place side), Danehy (New Street parking lot) and Harvard Square.



The map shows the existing 7 locations, plus the 4 additional boxes at Russell Field, Alewife MBTA Station (Steele Place side), Danehy (New Street side), and Harvard Square.

New Needle Reimbursement Pilot Program

One of the programs being funded through the opioid settlement funds is a new **Needle Reimbursement Pilot Program**. The purpose of this program is to reduce the number of unsafely discarded syringes. Participants are paid \$0.20 per syringe with a \$10 daily cap. This type of program is a tested strategy to incentivize safe disposal of syringes, provide a low threshold point of contact for people that use drugs, improve quality of life, reduce public safety concerns, and reduce service requests related to needles. The program also provides participants with resources to connect with further care and treatment options in the community.

The program **began operation in August** outside the Alewife MBTA station on Steele Place on Wednesday mornings (4:30 AM-6 AM). **3,363 needles were collected** in the first 4 weeks of operation and we expect the program to grow as more people learn about it.

Conclusion / Next Steps

Based on the data we have regarding the volume of needles being collected at the needle boxes and the high priority locations, we will be adding needle boxes at the bus turnaround on Rindge Avenue, the Alewife MBTA station, Danehy Park (New Street parking lot), and Harvard Square. Public Health will continue distributing Naloxone through their public events, overdose prevention training and through the Care Team. Additionally, Public Health will be piloting the public health vending machine that would dispense free Naloxone, other harm reduction materials, and other public health-related goods. In addition, residents should call in any **needles to ECC through the non-emergency line at 617-349-3300** and the call center will dispatch appropriate city staff to safely collect and dispose of needles.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager