

as well, perhaps the most dangerous of which is Hepatitis C. During the last few years, a needle exchange program has been implemented in Vancouver, and there is no doubt that this has assisted in reducing the number of HIV cases among IDUs since 1996. The program has involved fixed sites open during certain hours, in combination with mobile van units which have sometimes operated on a 24-hour basis. Data from health specialists in the field indicate that the mobile van units which operate around the clock have been particularly important, since clients of the van-based needle exchange program have a higher risk profile for HIV and other infectious diseases than those attending a fixed site.⁸ As one specialist noted, "funding for needle exchanges was variable, and at one time vans had to be removed due to a budgetary shortfall."⁹

So far the discussion has painted in broad strokes the HIV-injection drug use problem. Yet crucial variations exist across social class, race, gender, as well as other variables. The poor and/or homeless cocaine or heroin addict on East Hastings Street may be relatively prone to share contaminated needles with fellow addicts. But the 'jacuzzi junkie' in Kitsolano has the economic means to avoid dirty needles, and because of social taboos, is more likely to 'snort' or smoke cocaine or opiates than to inject them. Hence, among addicts, those with greater economic means are presumably less likely to be infected by HIV.

Race is another important variable. In Vancouver, aboriginals "are over-represented among IDUs."¹⁰ Further, Native IDUs are more likely to be female (51% as opposed to 28% of the general population of IDUs), more likely to be HIV positive (30% versus 21%), and less likely to be enrolled in a methadone treatment program (5% versus 14%).¹¹ This suggests that beyond the racial variations among Vancouver's aboriginal IDUs, important cultural distinctions exist among other racial groups throughout the country. Beyond this, many of those interviewed for this project reported racism on the part of authorities, directed not only against aboriginals, but against blacks, orientals, hispanics and so on¹² - a topic to which we shall return in an ensuing discussion which addresses related security