

Reyna was becoming exhausted by her addiction, homelessness, poverty, and loneliness. She yearned for normalcy. "This is the worst situation I've ever been in in my life—the worst situation. I had hard times, of course, in the USA, but not like this. This is a very, very hard place."

She said she wanted to stop using. "It's come to a point where I am getting depressed just by looking at everybody and looking at myself." But quitting meant *lo malilla*, the symptoms of withdrawal that can include weeks of diarrhea, vomiting, dizziness, and wrestling with suicidal thoughts. Reyna had done it before with the help of methadone, but here she did not have that option. The few programs that offered the opiate substitute charged for it and were far from El Bordo, which meant paying bus fare, too. "Over there in the USA, I probably would've been to the methadone place. But I don't have money here to go."

A study led by UCSD epidemiologist Steffanie Strathdee found that paying for methadone "defied the common sense" of many users. Why travel all the way to a clinic to pay for something to ward off *lo malilla* when that same money could buy two hits of heroin?



In January 2014, Cosme Caudras and a colleague from Prevensa, a free clinic near El Bordo, handed condoms and five syringes to each person who came up to their van at a section of the canal known as Los Alamos.

For the preceding three years, Prevensa's mobile program had been giving out 60 syringes per person, a month's worth, and the van made several stops along an eight-mile stretch of the canal. But Prevensa's needle and syringe exchange program depended largely on support from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which ended in December 2013 because Mexico's rising economic status had made it ineligible. By design, the Global Fund started projects that, if successful, governments were supposed to continue funding themselves. That did not happen in Tijuana. As a result, Prevensa cut its mobile program from six days a week, 1,500 syringes per outing, to one day with 750 distributed—and it bypassed the crowd at El Bordo, the most populated section of the canal. SER (Centro de Servicios), another nongovernmental organization, stopped its mobile program altogether, and offered exchanges only at its office, three days a week, which required cutting staff from 12 to two.

El Cuete's preliminary data in early 2015 showed that sharing recently had increased by 40%.

