

Public policy and harm reduction

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• Ouzasert dazvle ap mferentis de mroas



• mroas dazvle ap mferentis de mroas

Structure of the session

- What is harm reduction
- Advocacy and policy change as understood by Eurasian Harm Reduction Network
- Examples of advocacy/policy work and advocacy tools
 - Some in this presentation
 - Many more from the audience 😊

What is harm reduction

- Approach aimed to base drug policy and other related policies on human rights and public health principles.
 - Recognition that some people always have and always will engage in behaviours which carry risks, such as casual sex, sex work, and drug use.
 - Mitigation of the potential dangers and health risks associated with the risky behaviours themselves.
 - Reducing harms associated with, or caused by, the legal circumstances under which the behaviours are carried out

Harm reduction and HIV

- Examples of work: needle exchange, condom distribution, opioid substitution therapy, peer driven approaches, outreach work
- All of them have proven to reduce HIV spread and improve uptake of HIV care
- Harsh drug policies, policing and incarceration of drug users lead to increased rates of HIV

Why harm reduction is debated

- Drug policy is politicized
- International drug conventions (historically) focused on international control with little attention to drug users themselves (or human rights)
- Some people believe in drug free world and that harm reduction is a recognition of our failure to seek for drug free world
- Evidence of efficacy and cost effectiveness is not enough for policy and decision making
- Help to drug users is not first priority
- No unity of civil society on harm reduction
- Involvement of people who use drugs is seen as involvement of criminals into debate around Criminal Code...

Where harm reduction debate

- Biggest supporters of harm reduction are Western Europe, Australia
- Biggest opponents to harm reduction: governments of the US, Russia, Japan, Egypt, Sweden
 - But the US has the largest number of people on substitution therapy
 - Russian government funds needle exchange
 - Sweden recently changed policy slightly but not practice so much

Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

- Balkans: substitution therapy in early 1990s in response to increased demand for opioid treatment
- The rest: HIV epidemic
 - 1995-1996 first outbreaks of HIV among injecting drug users
 - Kaliningrad, Russia;
 - Nikolaev and Odessa, Ukraine;
 - Svetlogorsk, Belarus

Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (formerly Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network)

- 1997 - found in Warsaw, Poland
- 2002 - established Secretariat in Vilnius, Lithuania
- 2008 - unites more than 280 members

EHRN mission

- To support, develop and advocate for harm reduction approaches in the field of drugs, HIV, public health and social exclusion by following the principles of humanism, tolerance, partnership and respect for human rights and freedoms

Major directions of work

- Informational exchange, support and networking
- Advocacy for policy change
- Technical assistance and capacity building (Knowledge Hub)
- Special programs
 - Global Fund and civil society: Civil Society Action Team
 - Support for civil society in HIV field in partnership with ICASO and AIDS Action Europe (Russia, Ukraine)

Advocacy and policy change what is needed

1. Issues → Targets/goals
2. Tools/arguments
 - Conventions, policy documents
 - Evidence base
 - Situation analysis
3. Partners (!major!)
4. Capacities
 - Allocated human resources
 - Building capacities of ourselves and partners
 - Financial resources
 - Advocacy toolkit
5. Plan

1. Issues addressed by EHRN

To address such issues as:

- Repressive drug policies
- Resistance to evidence-based interventions such as opioid substitution therapy and overdose prevention
- Inadequate access to HIV and hep C treatment (also discrimination of specifically IDUs in access to those treatments)
- Stigma and discrimination
- Priorities for 2008-2009:
 - EHRN priorities 2008-2009: overdose, drug policy and opioid substitution therapy

2. Means used by EHRN

- Situation assessments and reports
- Mass media list
- Networking and exchange among advocates (possibility to get info and support from other countries, also possible speakers!)
- Organizing/participation at international and national events
- Engaging in communication (letters, corridors, working groups etc)
- Awareness raising for expanding supporters
- Contact list whom to target (limited)

International documents used for harm reduction advocacy

- International level:
 - Human rights conventions (access to highest attainable standard of health for everyone)
 - Evidence base collections by the UN agencies and in scientific journals
 - UNGASS on HIV Declaration of Commitment
 - UN System document: Principles of Drug Demand Reduction
- EU level:
 - EU Drugs Strategy, Action Plan
 - EU Council's Recommendation on Reducing Negative Health and Other Consequences
 - Dublin Declaration on HIV/AIDS

Arguments in favour of harm reduction - combination of health, economic, drug policy, justice

- Effective in HIV prevention and management dependency
- Dependency is a chronic disease
- Cost effective/beneficial
- Reducing criminality
- Does not facilitate drug use
- Does not contradict International Drug Conventions
- Implemented in neighboring countries☺

3. Partners - example of Coalition from national level in small country

- Medical professionals
- Service providers
- Human rights groups
- Groups of people who use drugs and PLHIV
- People from decision making bodies

4. Capacities

- Allocate staff for advocacy/policy work
 - Usually it is head of organization who is doing everything...
 - Funding is needed
 - Establishing advocacy networks and having coordinating staff is helpful
 - Invest into training, technical assistance and using guides!

Advocacy guides

- WHO Advocacy Guide 2005 (English)
 - HIV/AIDS prevention among injecting drug users
 - Arguments / contra-arguments
- Russian Harm Reduction Network's Advocacy Guidelines (Russian)
 - Advocacy in the HIV field, more focused on Russian specifics
- Upcoming toolkit to be produced by EHRN
- Advocacy trainings on harm reduction
 - (in Russian; by EHRN)

5. Plan

- Most complicated part, as well as implementation
- Better smaller but more realistic and with bigger vision

Examples

- Multi-strategy advocacy on ongoing basis
- Using analysis for national advocacy and creating network for follow up
- How EU documents can be helpful for changing
- Developing and stating civil society position in policy dialogue
- Crisis management through alliances
- Using new tools, like internet
- Building social responsibility in private sector
- More?

Substitution therapy advocacy I

- Substitution treatment (ST): snapshots of situation and analysis of guidelines (2003; 2006; 2008)
 - Review of guidelines of each country pointing strong and weak parts (by experts)
 - Overview of ST situation
 - Networking between substitution treatment providers
 - List of prices and producers of substitution medications

Substitution therapy advocacy II

- 2004 Feb: letter to WHO DG
 - More than 200 organizations signed from over the world (appr 70 from Europe & C-Asia)
- 2004 April: WHO starts the process of inclusion methadone in the List of Essential Medications
- 2004 July: WHO actively advocates for ARV 4 IDUs at AIDS2004-Bangkok
- Since 2004: Active WHO-EURO monitoring of HIV treatment access for drug users and clients of substitution therapy
- 2006, 2008: Using Eastern European and Central Asian AIDS Conferences for advocacy of the Russia's policy towards substitution therapy ...

Regional advocacy for improved sex work regulation

- Regional analysis of epidemiology, legislation, police practices and services for sex workers
- Follow up at national level:
 - Round tables with policy makers, police, service providers and other stakeholders
 - Press release
 - Outcomes: initiated ongoing debates regarding policy changes in Kyrgyzstan, Bulgaria, Serbia, Lithuania
- Follow up at regional level:
 - A regional network SWAN established based on human rights and harm reduction principles

EU and civil society engagement in drug policy

- EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan:
 - Foreseen civil society engagement in drug policy
 - Commission established Civil Society Forum on Drugs in 2007-2008
 - Now this is turn for national governments to engage (happened in Hungary but not many other countries)

Using new technologies for awareness raising

- UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):
 - 2003, Moscow: Director does not want to engage with civil society
 - 2007: UNODC continues stating importance of engagement with civil society but not much changed in actions at least by some officials
- Hungarian Civil Liberties Union
 - Wonderful video clip showing how UNODC chief is escaping answering questions to civil society representative
 - Thousands of views internationally already in a week
 - UNODC colleagues watched it as well

Civil society engages itself

- UNGASS on drugs: evaluation 1998-2009
- NGO process Beyond 2008
 - Regional and international forums to gather NGOs of different ideologies for a joint statement
 - A joint statement is a tool
 - A joint statement to be presented at the UN level to governments as input from civil society
 - <building on HIV example>

Crisis management at national level

- In Lithuania harm reduction services threatened to be closed (statements of Parliament members)
- National drug program and EU policies used as a key argument
- International and national stakeholders with letters, press conferences
- Follow up awareness raising through media work, work with politicians and through multi-stakeholder round tables

Pharmacies and harm reduction in Romania

- Work of ARAS and Romanian Harm Reduction Network
- Pharmacies is the primary source of syringes for drug users but often they don't sell syringes to drug users
- Training pharmacists
- Work with pharmacists, which led to a position statement of Pharmacists Association about social responsibility and role in HIV

More?