

POLICY BRIEF ON ACCESS TO HIV- AND CO-INFECTION(S) TREATMENT, CARE AND PREVENTION SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

In Europe, the landscape of drug policy and harm reduction services shows a mix of progress and setbacks, with varying degrees of implementation and success across countries. While some countries have made significant progress towards integrating harm reduction into their public health strategies, others lag, hampered by legal barriers, lack of political will, and stigmatisation of people who use drugs.

Policy plays a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of drug use and communicable disease responses. In recent decades, there has been a gradual shift in Europe from punitive approaches towards more health-centred policies. This shift is evident in the increasing adoption of decriminalisation policies and a focus on harm reduction and health care services for people who use drugs. Such policies align with the 10-10-10 targets under the **United Nations' Political Declaration on HIV / AIDS**, which aims to reduce to 10% the proportion of countries with punitive legal and policy environments that impede effective HIV responses.

Addressing the needs of people who use drugs in the context of HIV and co-infection(s) is not just a health issue but also a matter of social justice and human rights. The pursuit of health equity, as enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), calls for a comprehensive approach that encompasses harm reduction, integrated care models, and supportive policies.

This policy brief advocates a paradigm shift towards a health-centric, rights-based approach to drug use and harm reduction. Drawing upon a wealth of evidence from across Europe, we outline a set of recommendations aimed at dismantling the barriers to harm reduction services for people who use drugs. Our call to action is grounded in public health, human rights, and social justice principles, urging stakeholders at all levels to embrace harm reduction not just as a policy choice but as a moral imperative.

RECOMMENDATIONS



HUMAN RIGHTS-CENTRIC DRUG POLICIES

Lead efforts to advocate for a paradigm shift in drug policies, emphasising health and human rights over punitive measures. Collaborate with service providers, human rights organisations, and affected communities to craft policies that prioritise harm reduction and the protection of individual rights.



LEGAL ADVOCACY FOR HARM REDUCTION

Engage in proactive legal advocacy efforts to challenge and reform policies hindering harm reduction services. Collaborate with legal experts, advocacy groups, service providers and people who use drugs to address legal barriers and create an enabling environment for the implementation of comprehensive harm reduction strategies.



ELIMINATE PENALTIES FOR DRUG USE

Support legal reforms that eliminate penalties for drug use, ensuring that individuals seeking healthcare services are not subject to punitive measures. This policy aims to reduce stigma, improve access to treatment, and create an environment where individuals feel comfortable seeking help without fear of legal consequences.



REGULATORY MEASURES IN PRISONS

Work closely with correctional institutions to establish and enforce regulatory measures supporting harm reduction. Provide necessary training for prison staff, allocate resources for harm reduction services, and create a supportive regulatory framework recognising the unique healthcare needs of individuals who use drugs in prison settings.



PROMOTE COMMUNITY-LED AND LOW-THRESHOLD SERVICES

Fostering an environment where individuals and groups of people who use drugs take ownership over addressing local challenges. Encourage grassroots initiatives by supporting local leaders, activists, and volunteers who wish to create or enhance existing services tailored to their needs. Advocate for removing barriers to existing services for people who use drugs.



EQUITABLE SERVICE DISTRIBUTION

Ensure equal access to services throughout the countries. Develop targeted policy frameworks that address regional disparities in service provision. Prioritise the allocation of resources to areas with historically limited access, fostering a more equitable distribution of healthcare services for people who use drugs.



ENSURE CONTINUITY OF CARE

Establish policies and collaborative frameworks to prevent disruptions in essential services for individuals who use drugs. Develop holistic care plans that transcend institutional boundaries, ensuring a seamless and patient-centred healthcare experience. Engage stakeholders to create a continuous approach to healthcare, reducing the risk of treatment interruptions and enhancing overall health outcomes for people who use drugs.



UNIVERSAL HIV TESTING ACCESS

Develop a robust network of HIV testing services accessible throughout the country. This includes mobile testing units, community clinics, and partnerships with low-threshold harm reduction services. Continuous access to testing is essential for early diagnosis and treatment initiation.



HEPATITIS C TREATMENT EXPANSION

Formulate and execute a comprehensive strategy to expand access to Hepatitis C treatments. This includes exploring funding mechanisms, streamlining approval processes, and engaging in negotiations

with pharmaceutical companies to secure affordable pricing, ensuring widespread availability of life-saving treatments.



DRUG CHECKING SERVICES

Initiate and promote drug checking services as a harm reduction strategy. This involves the establishment of supervised facilities equipped with advanced testing technologies, coupled with educational campaigns to inform individuals about dangerous substances emerging on the market.



DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS

Establish and scale up drug consumption rooms for safer drug use. Advocate for and support the creation of safer consumption spaces equipped with hygienic facilities and trained staff. These rooms provide a controlled environment where people who use drugs can engage in safer drug consumption practices, reducing the risks of overdoses and transmission of infectious diseases.



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