Public health dimension of the world drug problem: report by the Director-General to WHA75

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Main function and roles of WHO in the work on substance use and addictive behaviours

- **Main function:** To act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work (*defined by the WHO Constitution*)
- **Working on all psychoactive substances (alcohol, psychoactive drugs, psychotropic and narcotic medicines) and addictive behaviours**
- **Key roles include (i) Articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options; (ii) Setting norms and standards, and promoting and monitoring their implementation; (iii) Providing technical support, catalyzing change, and building sustainable institutional capacity; (iv) Shaping research agenda and generating new knowledge; (v) Monitoring the health situation and assessing health trends**
- **Mandates and roles defined by WHO Member States and decisions/resolutions adopted by WHO governing bodies of which the main is the World Health Assembly**
Context

- WHA70(18) decision requested the WHO Director-General to improve coordination and collaboration with UNODC and INCB and report to 71, 73 and 75th WHA on its implementation.

- 275 million people using psychoactive drugs and about 36 million people with drug use disorders worldwide.

- 583,000 deaths attributable to drug use in 2019 (WHO estimates) with 450,000 – due to opioids, 14,000 – cannabis.

- Injecting drug use accounts for an estimated 20% of HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa.
WHO areas of work to address the word drug problem

- Prevention of drug use and reduction of vulnerability and risks
- Access to controlled medicines
- Treatment and care of people with drug use disorders
- Harm reduction: prevention and management of the harms associated with drug use
- Monitoring and evaluation.
WHO role within the International Drug Control Conventions

- The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (Article 3)
- The 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances (Article 2)
  → Mandate WHO to undertake assessment of most prevalent and harmful psychoactive substances

- The WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) assesses:
  - the risks of abuse, dependence and harm to health
  - the importance of therapeutic use (where relevant)

- The ECDD recommends to the CND whether or not these substances:
  - should be placed under international control
  - if their level of control should be changed

- Mandatory national controls, reporting, and monitoring, overseen by International Narcotics Control Board - INCB.
Prevention of drug use and reduction of vulnerability and risks

- Primary and secondary prevention in Primary Health Care through screening and brief interventions for alcohol and drug use (ASSIST- and AUDIT-based)

- Collaboration with UNODC, UNICEF, UNESCO on primary prevention

- Substance use and road safety
WHO Collaboration with UNODC on prevention and treatment ("demand reduction")

- Continued implementation of the UNODC-WHO Program on Drug Dependence Treatment and Care (>10 years of collaboration)
- Stop-Overdose-Safely (SOS) initiative
- Co-leading the Interagency Technical Working Group on drug prevention, treatment and care (launched in Feb 2022)
In the area of drug use:

- 3 areas to be updated with new reviews:
  - Review of brief psychosocial interventions for people using cannabis or stimulants
  - Review of pharmacotherapies for stimulant dependence
  - Review of psychosocial interventions for stimulant dependence

- 2 de-novo recommendations:
  - digital health solutions in areas of alcohol and drug use
  - recovery-oriented services for drug use disorders

- Training course under development for WHO Academy
WHO’s work for improving access to controlled medicines

- WHO regularly updates WHO Model Lists of Essential medicines including for the effective and safe use of controlled medicines.

- WHO is in the process of revising the Guidelines for access to and safe use of controlled medicines, expected to be completed in 2022.

- These new guidelines will assist policymakers, programme managers, and experts in countries in the formulation and implementation of balanced policies that:
  - ensure access and safe use of controlled medicines.
  - while preventing their diversion, misuse, and harm to health.

- Joint INCB, UNODC, WHO statement issued in 2021 calling the international community for appropriate measures to mitigate risks of shortages of controlled medicines in the context of Covid-19.
WHO’s work on drug use and infectious diseases (HIV, viral hepatitis, STIs)

• Focus on harm reduction services and interventions, support to countries in development of national strategic plans and proposals to the GFATM (Global Fund) and PEPFAR (US)

• Needle and syringe exchange programs, support for opioid agonist maintenance treatment, opioid overdose prevention

• Mobilization of all the relevant stakeholders, development of technical tools and training webinars

• Global estimates of people who inject drugs (in collaboration with UNODC)

• Global Health Sector Strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (submitted to WHA75)
Thank you

Further information:

https://www.who.int/teams/mental-health-and-substance-use/alcohol-drugs-and-addictive-behaviours

https://www.who.int/health-topics/alcohol

https://www.who.int/health-topics/drugs-psychoactive#tab=tab_1

https://www.who.int/groups/who-expert-committee-on-drug-dependence