



Effective prevention methods are ready for implementation

Both experience and research has proven that drug addiction and other drug-related problems are both preventable and treatable. Prevention is effective, humane, cost-effective, and empowering. Prevention solves problems before they ever occur. And prevention reduces other social problems and should therefore be integrated into general health and development strategies based on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Indeed, the introductory paragraphs of the UNGASS Outcome Document highlight prevention as an important part of a drug strategy that is integrated, multidisciplinary, mutually-reinforcing, balanced, evidence-based, and comprehensive. Chapter 1 of that same document details the many aspects of prevention, demand reduction, and early intervention.

Of course, no “silver bullets” to drug-related problems exist. Rather, the causes of drug use, the consequences of such use, and the interventions needed to reduce drug-related harm are all multi-dimensional, as the UNGASS Outcome Document stresses.

Member States should use the UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention for guidance on prevention programs. These Standards offer a wide range of evidence-based primary prevention interventions that governments and civil society can easily implement. There is no reason to wait for more theoretical discussion in this area.

Effective prevention efforts as listed in the UNODC Standards are even more effective when they are combined and implemented across a broad cross-section of a community. Accordingly, local coalitions should involve a wide range of local authorities and public services, such as schools, police, parents groups, and community-based organisations. Several countries have developed this type of community actions through coalitions of committed people, and we advise Members States to build on these examples and experiences.

The Drug Policy Futures network urges all Member States to

- Define the overarching goal of their drug policies as reduction in drug use prevalence, or maintaining low levels of drug use.
- Monitor drug use prevalence on a regular basis, both on national and local level, and to use results to adjust policies and develop even more efficient prevention programmes.
- Develop and implement a culturally-sensitive model for “community-based multi-component actions” where communities are mobilized as part of a national programme of prevention.

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- Involve young children and youth in prevention, instead of exclusively engaging adolescents as a target audience for such programmes.
- Establish a national clearinghouse that can connect the many local prevention coalitions, provide them with training and documentation, and elevate prevention initiatives on the national political agenda.
- Introduce training and support programmes for local prevention workers and volunteers.
- Mobilize human resources and funds to secure that schools and local communities have proper systems for identification of and assistance to vulnerable groups, for young children and adolescents in particular.
- Establish national “better parenting” programmes that can be used by local communities and schools.

Given the existing heavy burden on public health systems in many developing societies, prevention may be the only viable option for many Member States. Public health infrastructure in many of these states is often weak or already overburdened, further increasing the need for successful prevention programmes, before drug-related problems develop

Similarly, drug prevention programmes must aim to reduce drug use prevalence, as it is a good proxy for the level of drug-related harm in a society. This means that prevention programmes must address both the availability of drugs and the social acceptability of drug use. Reduced numbers of regular drug users will lead to lower rates of problematic drug users, as well as a reduction in numbers of adolescents who are exposed to drug use in their circle of friends.

Effective prevention programmes result in more than just reduction in drug-related harm. They also contribute to the prevention of other social problems, empower individuals and communities, mobilize of human resources, promote good governance, rebuild the social fabric, and strengthen civil society. This is particularly true when prevention programs begin early, such as with early detection of adolescents who struggle with childhood traumas, family problems, abuse, school attendance, and other problematic issues. At such an early stage, basic support and interventions by teachers, health personnel or social workers, and even by family and neighbours can make a great difference for the rest of a child’s life.

This statement is supported by an alliance of networks covering more than 300 NGOs from all over the world:

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