

## UNODC/WHO Meeting on Treatment of Drug Use Disorders in Patients affected by Mental and Somatic Co-Morbidities (Demand Reduction)



November 2017 – Find out more about the UNODC/WHO Meeting on Treatment of Drug Use Disorders in Patients affected by Mental and Somatic Co-Morbidities (Demand Reduction) from 7 – 9 November 2017 that convened more than forty experts from twenty-six countries from all regions, including representatives from EMCDDA and WHO as well as a number of key civil society partners and a former drug user.

The Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section of the Drug Prevention and Health Branch convened an expert group meeting from

7 - 9 November 2017 to discuss drug use disorders and the different categories of mental and somatic comorbidities, as well as to understand diagnostic hurdles of such complex and multifactorial health problems. The central idea of **no wrong door** for treatment emerged as the consensus of the meeting and was said to be highlighted in the outcome document, which will support Member States in their efforts to develop innovative policies and evidence-based practices on drug use disorders with concomitant mental and somatic conditions. Through the active engagement of Permanent Missions, more than forty experts from twenty-six countries from all regions have contributed, including representatives from EMCDDA and WHO as well as a number of key civil society partners and a former drug user.

The expert group meeting was organized as part of the OFID-UNODC Joint Programme (GLOJ71) to treat drug dependence and its health consequences and to prevent HIV/Aids through TreatNet Phase II. This global programme is an important project of UNODC which goal it is to increase access to drug treatment for all those in need, with a special focus on the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS. High-level policy frameworks, such as the Outcome Document from the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug problem and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reference increased access to controlled medicines. The GLOJ71 project specifically aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.5, in which Member States committed to strengthen substance use prevention and treatment globally, as a crucial pillar of Goal 3, Good Health and Well-Being for All as well as with SDG 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

There is an increased global understanding of the importance of a comprehensive, science-based response to this problem that highlights the complexity and urgency of the matter. Many pathologies affect the already vulnerable population of drug users, especially co-occurring mental and somatic disorders. Patients with comorbid mental and drug use disorders account for an estimated 50% of all patients with drug use disorders. These patients show a higher psycho pathological severity, with more hospitalizations, an increased risk of overdoses and suicide with an increased mortality rate. Mental health disorders can be present before and throughout the development of a drug use disorder, and both can co-occur with somatic conditions that results from the use of drugs.

Furthermore, people who suffer from drug use disorders often have one or more accompanying medical issues as well, which may include lung or cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer and infectious

diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, and Tuberculosis. The different health conditions, similar to mental disorders, that co-occur with drug use disorders can compromise treatment and therefore go together with poor treatment outcomes and recovery in affected subjects.

Women are often more stigmatized and experience higher barriers to accessing treatment than men experience. Therefore, the experts concluded that reducing stigma and guaranteeing equal access to services has to be a key component of the document.

The experts discussed current ongoing research on the treatment of drug use disorders with comorbid mental and somatic problems. In a broader perspective, the experts also advised on how to better integrate services, seek financing, and work towards the sustainable development goals aimed at universal health coverage. By discussing state of the art treatment approaches and setting up a research network, UNODC is calling for action and will assist Member States in creating an awareness for managing treatment of such complex and multifactorial disorders.

The outcome document will be in line with UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, the UNGASS Outcome Document recommendations and the SDGs.