

**Thematic discussion on the implementation of the UNGASS
outcome document:
*“Our Joint Commitment to effectively addressing and countering
the world drug problem”.***

Availability of controlled substances for medical and scientific use

**Intervention from the World Health Organization
10 October 2016**

Mr Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for giving The World Health Organization the opportunity to participate in the thematic discussions on the implementation of the UNGASS outcome document.

The World Health Organization, as the directing and coordinating authority for health within the UN system, welcomes the prominent place given to public health in the UNGASS outcome document. WHO is committed to implementing the UNGASS recommendations related to health, and will work closely with UNODC, INCB, civil society and other international and regional partners to fulfil this commitment.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution S-30/1, adopted on 19 April 2016, underscores that the availability of internationally controlled drugs for medical and scientific purposes remains low to non-existent in many countries and emphasises the need for international cooperation to promote measures to improve access for these medicines. It highlights the leading role of the UNODC in addressing and countering the world drug problem, and calls for strengthened cooperation and enhanced coherence with the World Health Organisation and the INCB to improve access to controlled substances for public health.

Controlled medicines are needed to alleviate pain and suffering, enable surgery, treat physical and mental health issues, support dignified and comfortable end-of-life care, help people to overcome addiction, and to save lives. Health systems cannot work effectively without essential controlled medicines. However, despite their vital importance, access to controlled medicines remains inadequate around the world.

The importance of controlled medicines for public health has been emphasized in several World Health Assembly resolutions. These WHA Resolutions reflect Member States' commitment to ensure access to controlled medicines for Palliative care (WHA67.19), for Emergency and essential surgical care and anaesthesia (WHA68.15) and for Epilepsy (WHA68.20). These resolutions provide WHO with a strong mandate to support Member States efforts for addressing barriers to access, whilst preventing risks for diversion and abuse.

Barriers to access have been well documented including in the UNGASS outcome document. They relate to lack of knowledge on efficacy, safety and appropriate use of medicines; unduly restrictive regulations for supply and dispensing; and inefficiency of supply chains which leads to poor availability and affordability of medicines.

As part of its standard setting mandate, and based on rigorous scientific evidence, WHO Secretariat carries out regular reviews of efficacy and safety of medicines, including controlled medicines. These reviews inform recommendations for the inclusion or exclusion of these medicines in WHO recommended treatment guidelines and the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines. Currently, the WHO Secretariat is carrying out a review of new medicines for pain that could be considered for addition to the WHO EML by the WHO Expert Committee of Selection and Use in March 2017.

The WHO Secretariat has recently developed guidelines for the management of the persisting pain in Children and is currently developing new guidelines for the management of cancer pain in Adults.

WHO takes a collaborative approach to access to controlled medicines and works closely with UNODC and INCB to provide training and support to countries to maximise access to controlled medicines. WHO is actively contributing to the INCB Learning Project, which provides training to countries on important controlled medicines issues. The first regional and national meetings on the availability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances for medical and scientific purposes took place in April 2016 in Kenya and in July in Thailand.

WHO is also part of the Joint Global Programme (in collaboration with UNODC and Union for International Cancer Control, UICC) on access to controlled drugs for medical purposes, in particular for the management of pain. The programme is currently supported by Australia and Belgium and implemented in Ghana, East Timor and in Democratic Republic of the Congo. It aims to support countries to identify potential barriers to access, through examination of policies, legislations and the supply chain, and discusses and agrees with countries for plans and strategies for improvement.

WHO has also contributed to knowledge-sharing in access to controlled medicines through the UNODC led drug law enforcement agencies training, which has held in Ethiopia in September 2016.

In addition to specific controlled medicines programmes, WHO core work on essential medicines has a significant impact on access to these medicines. WHO currently implements programmes for strengthening pharmaceutical systems and improving access in more than 30 countries in the world, of which 15 are in Africa. Monitoring of availability and price of medicines, including medicines for pain relief, at health facility level is being carried out. WHO also works on advocacy, and capacity

building of prescribers and dispensers for the appropriate and responsible use of medicines.

As we move forward, work in countries will also focus on: using tools and guidance for more accurate forecasting and quantification of requirements for controlled medicines; exploring measures to improve efficiency and integrity of supply chains; facilitating assessments of policies and legislation related to controlled medicines; and supporting the development of balanced national policies on Controlled Substances that ensure availability and accessibility, whilst preventing misuse and abuse.

In conclusion, Mr Chair,

WHO is committed to intensifying collaboration with UN Organisations particularly UNODC and INCB, as well as civil society and other international and regional partners to contribute to the fulfilment of the UNGASS operational recommendations for improving availability and access to controlled medicines. WHO is keen to support the establishment of mechanisms that will ensure efficient inter- agency planning and coordination, and the provision of high quality and sustainable support to countries in need of balanced policies for improving access to controlled medicines.

We look forward to continuing our collaboration with UNODC, INCB, civil society and other international and regional partners to achieve these objectives and to proactively contribute to improving and protecting the health and welfare of people across the world.

Thank you.