

PROLOGUE

As part of our efforts to address drug use, we must consider the spread of HIV. The spread of HIV/AIDS in India has come to represent a grave danger to the country's future economic development and social stability. Although India continues to be a low prevalence country with an overall prevalence rate of less than 1% among the adult population, the absolute number of people affected is high at 5.1 million.* Injecting drug users are particularly at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because they are typically engaged in several high-risk behaviours. Needle sharing is common. Unsafe sex and involvement with sex workers is common.

In many cities with concentrated populations of IDUs, the HIV prevalence is above the critical level of 5%, causing great public health concerns. Available data also indicates that HIV infection is spreading from high-risk groups to low-risk groups in the population. Of serious immediate concern is the original role of IDU in the 'feminization' of the epidemic, where HIV is sexually transmitted from injecting drug users to their non drug-using wives and partners. In this way, the indirect impact of IDU on the spread of the HIV epidemic is considerable.

Intervention strategies are required urgently.

In order to establish a basis for analysing the problem and to recommend a set of solutions, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and UNODC considered it important to co-sponsor the research that went into this monograph. We believe it establishes the basis for a sound, effective programme to respond to, and ultimately defeat, the threat posed by the IDU-driven spread of HIV/AIDS in India.

UNODC is also one of the co-sponsors of UNAIDS. UNAIDS is the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. It brings together UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNESCO, WHO, World Bank, UNODC and ILO and builds on each member's energies and strengths and prompts them to take collective action against AIDS.

Based on the information available, UNODC, UNAIDS, Government of India and civil society could consider strengthening joint efforts to mainstream HIV concerns in ongoing drug demand reduction programmes as well as placing the concerns of substance users on the HIV prevention agenda of the country.



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* Note: According to [NACO's new estimates](#), 2.5 million people in India are living with HIV.