SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

UNODC’s work on drugs and health is inextricably linked to multiple Targets of SDG 3. The Office’s mandate is fully in line with Target 3.5 on several fronts. UNODC supports a balanced public health-oriented approach to the drug problem by working to end discrimination against people who use drugs and by strengthening access to comprehensive, evidence-based and gender-responsive services for the prevention of drug use and treatment of substance use disorders, including as an alternative to conviction or punishment.

UNODC assists Member States in achieving Target 3.5 by promoting evidence-based prevention in line with the UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, which addresses vulnerabilities and builds resilience in children at different ages of development. This is done through building individuals’ skills or strengthening social institutions of influence (namely the family, the school and the community), eventually seeking to bridge such interventions in a comprehensive strategic framework of preventive response supporting the safe and healthy development of children and youth.

UNODC’s Family Skills aim at strengthening communication, trust, problem-solving skills and conflict resolution within the family. It targets families living in diverse social contexts, but specific support is provided to those caregiving in humanitarian or stressful settings.
For instance, following its engagement in the Cox Bazar region in Bangladesh, UNODC has expanded its work to support families affected by the Syria/Türkiye earthquake and the Ukraine crisis, where through interagency work, over 11.5 million people have benefited from positive parenting tools. Overall, such family skills have proven to prevent (or at worse delay) initiation to drug use, prevent violence against children, reduce early aggressive behaviour and delinquency, reduce anti-social peer affiliation and increase peer pressure resistance skills, as well as promote positive mental health in caregivers and their children.

Life and social skills through school-based programmes are also core to UNODC. For instance, in partnership with the Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF), UNODC has been implementing the Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence (LQSFA) in several countries. This programme is an effective evidence-based prevention programme for young people aimed to help them develop various social emotional skills, take responsibility, communicate effectively, make healthy decisions and resist substance abuse. Initially launched in South-Eastern Europe, it gradually expanded to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia, reaching more than 10,000 students in over 180 elementary schools across the region. Building on the successful results of the initiative in the region, the LQSFA programme was also launched in Slovenia in 2022, and currently plans of scale-up the programme are being discussed across all countries in the Western Balkan region.

Furthermore, referred to as the “torchbearers” of the 2030 Agenda, young people are critical actors to accelerate change and advance the SDGs. Launched in 2012, UNODC’s Youth Initiative on Drug Use Prevention has been connecting young people from around the globe and empowering them to become active in their schools, communities and youth groups for substance use prevention and health promotion. Throughout the decade, its flagship event in the broader context of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the Youth Forum, has served as a platform for 445 youth from 101 countries to exchange ideas, perspectives and visions on how to safeguard the health and well-being of their peers and convey their joint message to the global level policy makers, directly contributing to SDG 3.

In addition, the Office supports Member States in addressing the global problem of synthetic drugs and achieving SDG 3 targets by implementing a comprehensive Synthetic Drug Strategy. Among other initiatives, UNODC has developed a UN Toolkit on Synthetic Drugs tailored to experts, practitioners and policymakers in the fields of health, law enforcement,
forensics and research. The platform is a one-stop shop that features more than 320 resources and tools from across the UN system and provides practical guidance towards identifying comprehensive solutions to the threats posed by synthetic drugs.

UNODC’s field activities under SDG 3 also include assisting in providing quality services to governmental and non-governmental entities on the prevention of communicable diseases; gender equity; and developing and implementing tailor-made programmes to reduce the increasing trend of drug use, HIV/AIDS, and Hepatitis C. In particular, UNODC is mandated to provide HIV prevention, treatment and care among people who use drugs or are in prisons, thus contributing towards ending AIDS by 2030, a component of Target 3.3.

Moreover, UNODC’s research work supports countries to strengthen forensic sector capacities by implementing drug monitoring systems to collect reliable data, including on the identification and/or detection of substances and new psychoactive substances of abuse. For over 25 years, UNODC has been publishing the World Drug Report (WDR), providing a science-based global perspective and overview of the world drug problem. The 2023 WDR features a special chapter on drug trafficking and crimes that affect the environment in the Amazon Basin, as well as sections on clinical trials involving psychedelics and medical use of cannabis; drug use in humanitarian settings; innovations in drug treatment and other services; and drugs and conflict. The Office’s research on drugs generates valuable information for experts and policymakers to analyse and respond to persistent and emerging challenges across the drug supply chain and examine their interconnectedness with all aspects of sustainable development, peace and security and human rights.

Lastly, the Office promotes standards and guidelines and seeks to establish effective partnerships at a country level and internationally, including with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF), and other civil society organizations.