

**WHO intervention at the plenary session of 65th session of the
Commission on Narcotic Drugs.**

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Delivered by Meg Doherty

Madame/Mister Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

The World Health Organization prioritizes, the protection of people from harm due to drug use, improved access to controlled medicines, the advancement of universal health coverage for people who use drugs and with drug use disorders, and the protection of populations from health emergencies.

The rapidly unfolding humanitarian emergency in Ukraine and its neighbouring European countries, brings enormous suffering to millions of people, putting, at risk, the fundamental right of people to safely access health services.

Ensuring equitable access to and appropriate use of safe and effective medicines under international control continues to be a challenging task for many health systems, particularly in times of humanitarian emergencies and the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence monitors new psychoactive drugs as they enter the market and issues evidence-based recommendations about the level of international control to

prevent their harmful use, and also to ensure access to drugs with proven medical use.

Severe shortages of essential controlled medicines have been reported during this pandemic and in emergencies situations, in particular for medicines used in intensive care units.

Additionally, people with drug use disorders are at increased risk of COVID-19 and its complications. It is of paramount importance to ensure their access to effective and ethical prevention, treatment and harm reduction services, including vaccination against COVID-19.

It is essential to provide uninterrupted critical services, including opioid agonist maintenance for the treatment of opioid dependence, prevention of drug overdose including community distribution of naloxone, sterile injecting equipment, and other screening and treatment services to manage the important health conditions associated with drug use such as HIV, TB and viral hepatitis.

WHO has assessed the impact of the pandemic on health services and drug overdose prevention programs; and critical harm reduction services and opioid agonist maintenance treatment were disrupted in about half of countries involved in the assessment.

Unprecedented challenges stemming from the recent humanitarian and pandemic emergencies have inspired the development of innovative approaches to provide controlled medicines. These innovations in service provision for people with drug use disorders have demonstrated the potential for improved access through take-home opioid agonist maintenance medicines. These approaches may help advance Universal Health Coverage beyond the humanitarian and pandemic emergencies.

Global collaborative and coordinated efforts are needed more than ever to assess the impact of these emergencies on drug use and service provision, and strengthen the preparedness of prevention, treatment and harm reduction services before and during health emergencies.

The World Health Organization will continue to work on the public health dimensions of the world drug problem in collaboration with UNODC, INCB and other partners including governments, donors, implementers and civil society.

We must work together to advance public health approaches in drug policies and accelerate the implementation of commitments made in line with the SDG 2030 agenda and the recommendations of UNGASS 2016 on the World Drug Problem.