



CONCEPT NOTE

UNODC Policymakers Training Package on the Nature, Prevention, and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The UNODC Policymakers Training Package on the Nature, Prevention, and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders was developed in 2016, as part of UNODC's work in supporting Member States in their efforts to create humane, effective and evidence-based drug use prevention and drug dependence treatment and care services.

This tool aims at supporting Member States in developing appropriate policies, strategies, programmes and interventions targeted at preventing drug use and increasing the availability of and access to comprehensive systems of care for people affected by drug use and drug use disorders.

The ultimate goal of this initiative is to contribute to the efforts of Member States in building a health- and human-rights-oriented response to the problem of drugs and to reduce the burden caused by associated health and social consequences. With the involvement

and active participation of public governmental institutions, universities, treatment centres, civil society organizations and prevention and health professionals, UNODC promotes a systematic, intersectoral and multidisciplinary response to a very complex problem, affecting large segments of

“Each person counts” is the motto of the UNODC Policymakers training package, which aims at strengthening the motivation and commitment of policymakers around the world towards the healthy and safe development of children and towards improving the lives of those affected by drug use disorders.

To ensure that children and youth, especially the most marginalized and poor, can realize their full potential, drug use prevention strategies should deliver an integrated range of interventions and policies, based on scientific evidence and targeting multiple settings, ages and levels of risk.

Drug dependence is considered a multi-factorial health disorder that often follows the course of a relapsing and remitting chronic disease. Thus evidence-based, effective treatment and care services, that guarantee the same quality standards and opportunities that are provided for any other chronic disease, need to be put in place.

For every dollar spent on prevention, treatment and care services, between 7 and 10 USD can be saved in future health, social and crime costs.

Policymakers must and can make a difference.



the world's population and supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3.5, on strengthening substance use prevention and treatment, and related goals and target of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

According to the 2018 World Drug Report, over 31 million people who use drugs are estimated to suffer from drug use disorders, and of these, 10.6 million people inject drugs. The magnitude of the burden of drug use is underlined by the estimated 28 million years of “healthy” life (disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)) lost worldwide in 2015 as a result of premature death and disability caused by drug use. Yet, only one in six problem users has access to drug dependence treatment services - thus pointing to the large gap in service provision that still remains to be closed¹. This situation calls for renewed efforts to support the prevention of drug use and the treatment of drug use disorders, including services aimed at reducing the adverse health consequences of drug use. With the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) Outcome Document and Target 3.5 under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, Member States reaffirmed their commitment for a balanced and health-centred system approach.

2. Description of Policy Maker Training

The workshops discuss a variety of issues related to the nature of drug use and drug use disorders, as well as prevention, treatment, care and rehabilitation services, including the following.

Vulnerabilities to the initiation of drug use

Science tells that, in addition to a low perception of risk about the use of psychoactive substances, a wide range of factors in the context in which children and youth develop can make children and youth vulnerable to initiating risky behaviours, including substance use, and developing substance use disorders. These vulnerability factors, which also differ by age, include: family dysfunction, neglect and abuse, low attachment to school, marginalised and/or violent communities or social norms and environments conducive to substance use. All these factors are opportunities for evidence-based prevention.

Evidence-based prevention interventions and policies

Preventive strategies encompass a range of programmes and policies to improve public health through identifying malleable risk and protective factors for substance and drug use, helping children and youth to reach their age-related developmental goals, assessing the efficacy of such prevention interventions, as well as for the adaptation of evidence-based programmes, policies and practices to differing local contexts. UNODC in close collaboration with WHO, successfully launched the second

¹ World Drug Report 2017, United Nations, May 2017,
http://www.unodc.org/wdr2017/field/Booklet_1_EXSUM.pdf



version of the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention, including a list of strategies that have been found effective in preventing substance use, including drug use, and other risky behaviours by supporting the healthy and safe development of children and youth.

How to implement evidence-based prevention

The UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention also identify HOW to implement strategies in order to maximize their chances of effectiveness according to the science. The workshop discusses this with particular regard to settings that are crucial to the development of children and youth, namely families and schools. In addition, it discusses evidence-based prevention in other settings, including media, the workplace, entertainment venues and the health sector.

Pharmacological treatment

Medications are used in different settings and at different stages of treatment, which include the treatment of acute intoxication (overdose), the treatment of withdrawal symptoms (detoxification) and relapse prevention (also known as maintenance therapy). Methadone maintenance therapy (MMT) provided together with psychosocial treatment has represented the gold standard in the treatment of opioid drug use disorder for more than 30 years. The benefits of medication, in combination with psychosocial interventions serves as a vital tool to enhance motivation for change as well as treatment effectiveness.

Psychosocial treatment

Psychosocial treatment includes a large variety of counselling strategies and techniques for the effective treatment of drug use disorders. It can enhance pharmacological treatment efficacy by increasing medication compliance, retention in treatment and acquisition of skills that reinforce the effects of medications. In addition, it serves an important long-term goal of recovery maintenance.

Prevention of health and social consequences of drug use and drug use disorders

A comprehensive system of care of people with drug use disorders includes health care and social protection at any stage of treatment to prevent and treat the many health and social consequences of drug use and drug use disorders. This includes overdose, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C, etc., but should be also seen in a holistic approach to address the many physical and mental co-morbidities that interact with drug use disorders.

A systems approach to policy development, strategic planning and services coordination

Prevention strategies, treatment services and policies can be organised in different ways and in different system. The workshop discusses some of the best practices in this field, including with regard to issues such as quality assurance, continuous training of practitioners, and data collection and research.

The international drug control system

The international drug control conventions have been created to protect and promote public health, particularly of vulnerable groups such as children and adolescents at risk, marginalized persons,



individuals affected by social exclusion or disadvantages, or people with a history of affective trauma, psychological problems and mental health concomitant disorders. The conventions unambiguously provide support for people with drug use disorders and people who need controlled drugs for medical purposes and their provisions should and can be implemented in full respect of the human rights and the dignity of individuals.

Human rights and the dignity of individuals

Health is a fundamental human right indispensable for the exercise of other human rights. The dignity of human beings and their right to freedom, including the right to health, are essential elements of the drug control system, particularly protecting the rights of children, adolescents and other vulnerable groups. In the case of people with drug use disorders, this includes the right to the effective treatment of drug use disorders, and the prevention and treatment of other conditions commonly found in people who use drugs, such as HIV, hepatitis, TB, mental health disorders and drug overdoses.

Treatment of persons with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system

The right to health and the right to access adequate health services must also extend to any person in contact with the criminal justice system, no matter the charges nor the stage of the legal proceedings. In addition, treatment can be offered as an alternative to people with drug use disorders in appropriate cases, thus reducing recidivism and prison overcrowding and improving the health of individuals and communities.

3. TARGET AUDIENCE FOR POLICY MAKER WORKSHOPS

This training package is specially tailored to policymakers, with key decision-making responsibilities from the health, law enforcement, counter-narcotics, education and other relevant social sectors.

It should be noted that this workshop provides an overall understanding of the nature of drug use and drug use disorders and of evidence-based prevention and treatment. If managers and practitioners need to develop their skills on actually delivering prevention strategies and treatment services, please feel free to contact UNODC, as more appropriate training could be provided through other tools.



4. PURPOSE OF POLICY MAKER WORKSHOPS

The UNODC Policymakers Training package on the Nature, Prevention, and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders is a dynamic tool that can be adapted to the needs of countries and specific audiences in line with UNODC International Standards on [Prevention](#) and [Treatment](#). It aims at enhancing the knowledge, understanding, scope, and potential of the drug control health and education system for improving the quality of life people affected by drug use disorders. More specifically, the purpose of the package is to:

- Offer policymakers updated information provided by science and by many decades of drug use prevention and drug dependence treatment and care research and experience. This tool outlines evidence-based and cost-effective national drug demand reduction strategies from different points of view—based on different competencies, different institutional roles, and different backgrounds.
- Strengthen the capacity of policymakers to draft, negotiate, advocate and support drug policies which are in line with the International Drug Conventions as they relate to protecting the lives of people affected by substance use disorders whilst ensuring safety and security of the population.
- Provide policymakers with tools to reinforce their commitment to removing stigma and discrimination, breaking social exclusion, replacing punitive strategies with social cohesion and increasing opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration
- Offer policymakers the opportunity to cooperate in multidisciplinary teams and inter-ministerial programmes to create articulated and consistent responses to the drug use phenomenon.
- Advise Government officers to establish permanent contacts with scientists and academics, with the aim of aligning all policy decisions on science-based evidence, rather than on ideology or personal views.
- Point towards the importance of engaging families and the community at large in prevention initiatives and the drug dependence recovery process of patients.
- Encourage policymakers to design science-driven and effective interventions, to invest appropriate human and financial resources in drug demand reduction, and to share the responsibility of care.

5. METHODOLOGY OF POLICY MAKERS WORKSHOP

This training package utilizes a variety of training methods and tools to ensure an effective, interactive, participatory and enriching learning process. Numerous opportunities are provided for participants to interact and build on their experiences. Moreover, the training allows for a review and analysis of the particularities of the existing drug demand reduction strategies in a participant's country, and to develop a concrete action plan to adapt and enhance national strategies. An interactive policy maker training is typically delivered over 3-4 days to ca. 30 participants from different sectors in a country (including drug control, health, justice, education, law enforcement, youth, social welfare, etc.). In



case of a regional training, it is recommended that a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 7 representatives per country participate, each from a different sector.

6. TRAINING MODULES

The curriculum is based on the manual “Training of Policymakers on the Nature, Prevention and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders”, covering a range of issues in great depth, whilst the following would be typical programme:

DAY 1

- Registration and pre-test
- Opening
- Overview of the workshop and introduction of participants
- Welcome and Overview of the Issue and the Workshop
- The nature of drug use disorders and implications for policies
- Vulnerabilities to the initiation of drug use
- Evidence-based prevention interventions and policies

DAY 2

- How to implement evidence-based prevention in schools and families
- Evidence-based prevention in other settings
- Prevention of health and social consequences of drug use and drug use disorders
- Introduction to psychosocial treatment

- Psychosocial treatment: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

DAY 3

- Psychosocial treatment: Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)
- Pharmacological Treatment
- A systems-approach: policy development, strategic planning and services coordination
- A systems-approach to evidence-based prevention

DAY 4

- Drug use disorders and the drug Conventions
- Human rights and the dignity of individuals/ patients/ clients
- Treatment of persons with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system
- Post-seminar questionnaires and evaluation of trainers
- Closing

7. CONTACT

Thank you for your interest in the UNODC Policymakers Training Package on the Nature, Prevention and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or queries.

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