

UNODC Executive Director's statement, International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, 26 June 2021

Knowing the facts about drugs can save lives.

In 2020, an estimated 275 million people used drugs and over 36 million suffered from drug use disorders, according to the UNODC World Drug Report. Drugs are destroying health and stealing futures, with drug use alone killing almost half a million people in 2019.

Awareness of the risks and access to evidence-based treatment and care can help prevent such tragedies.

The COVID pandemic has shown us the vital role of trustworthy, scientific information and the power of community in influencing health choices. We must urgently leverage this potential to address the world drug problem.

The theme of this year's International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is "Share facts on drugs. Save lives." It highlights the need for evidence-based approaches to equip the public, as well as health and service providers, and decision makers with the tools to inform choices and effective services.

Health and safety depend on reliable information. Over the last two decades, cannabis potency has almost quadrupled in the United States, while doubling in Europe. But the percentage of adolescents who perceive regular cannabis use as harmful has decreased by as much as 40 per cent.

We need to fill gaps in trusted public information with greater investments in health, science, and data. Worldwide, only one out of 8 people in need of drug-related treatment receives it, and new HIV infections among people who inject drugs are not declining.

Governments need to expand evidence-based prevention and treatment programmes, as well as monitoring and early warning mechanisms to help lower-income countries detect and counter new substances and use trends.

Let's make verified information our ally as we address world drug challenges with shared responsibility, and advance towards a vision of health for all.