The Science of Drug Prevention

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Why?

- Why science?
- Good intentions are not enough
- Why prevention?
- Human dignity and values
- Prevalence of drug use, abuse and dependency
- Impact on health and welfare
- Social and economic costs
Drug prevention

- A vital part of a public-health-oriented drug policy

- A key aspect of promoting health in the twenty-first century, and involves a multidisciplinary endeavor,
• A common view on drug prevention, especially among lay people, is that it consists in warning young people about the dangerous effects of drug use.

• However, the provision of information on drug effects alone, mostly using media campaigns, has, according to current research, no impact on drug-use behavior.

• Now, science allows us to tell a more complicated story
Types of Prevention

- **Universal** prevention — intervening with populations
- **Selective** prevention — intervening with vulnerable groups
- **Indicated** prevention — intervening with (vulnerable) individuals
- **Environmental** prevention strategies — intervening with societies and systems
• **Prevention strategies**, based on scientific evidence, that work with families, schools and communities can ensure that children and young people, including the most marginalized and poor, grow and stay healthy and safe into adulthood.

• Drug prevention is an integral part of a larger effort to ensure that the young are less vulnerable and more resilient.

• By targeting early liability factors rather than substance-use problems later in adolescence, interventions may reduce the adverse impact substance use has on the developing brain as well as preventing associated harms.
Supply reduction and Demand reduction

- Use different methods but can work in synergy.
- Supply reduction strategy is based on drug legislation, drug enforcement and interdiction activities aimed at the availability of drugs, i.e., at the supply of substances for use and abuse.
- Demand reduction and related measures include general prevention and treatment, and also consideration of other health-related issues, including HIV/AIDS prevention, and treatment and care with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.
Do we know what works in drug prevention?

There is a growing evidence base for what works and does not work in the field of drug prevention.
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Addiction

Legislation
Actions to reduce drug-related harm

- Infrastructures, services:
  - Legal system, administration, organizations, networks:
    - Groups, communities, population
    - Individuals
  - Developing services

- Advocacy, Networking organization
- Social mobilization
- Development of individual skills
The gaps in the science should make us cautious

But not deter us from action
Characteristics of an effective prevention system

- Consists of an integrated range of evidence-based interventions and policies, in multiple settings, targeting relevant ages and levels of risks.

- Given the complex interplay of protective and risk factors for substance abuse and other risky behaviors, a single intervention is never sufficient.

- Moreover, the overarching goal is to support the healthy and safe development of individuals.
• Support children and youth throughout their development and particularly at critical transition periods where they are most vulnerable, e.g. infancy and early childhood, at the transition between childhood and adolescence.

• Targets the population at large (universal prevention), but also support groups (selective prevention) and individuals (indicated prevention) that are particularly at risk.

• Address both individual and environmental factors of vulnerability and resilience.

• Reach the population through multiple settings (e.g. families, schools, communities, the workplace)
Effective prevention system requires

- Strong structural foundations
- Supportive policies and regulatory frameworks
- A strong basis in research and scientific evidence
- All relevant sectors involved at different levels
- Strong infrastructure for the delivery system
- Sustainability
EMCDDA. (2011) European Drug Prevention Quality Cycle
A challenge is to develop a drug policy that is proactive with regards to the changing scene of psychoactive substance that exists or will appear in different parts of the world.

The drug scene in the population or the community needs to be known in order to develop an optimal mix of intervention including programs and policies that proactively can meet the present and future needs.
In order to have a population impact the preventive interventions need to be scaled up to the community level.

A guiding principle is to go from belief to knowledge. Challenges are to do the right things in the right way.

However, gaps in knowledge should make us concerned, but not inactive.

Future drug policies need grounding in political decisions and in ethical considerations as well as actions be based on scientific knowledge and practical experiences.
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