

The potentially deadly consequences of the non-medical use of opioids have been known since science discovered their huge medical potential. Over the past 150 years, humanity has experienced several opioid crises but none as devastating as the present one affecting mainly North America with fentanyl and its analogues, and in parts of Africa and the Middle East with tramadol. Under the conditions of a globalized drug market, the risk that it may spread to many other regions has never been greater. The rapidly emerging crisis which has resulted in significant loss of lives calls for a coordinated, comprehensive and multidisciplinary response.

UNODC is the United Nations Secretariat entity responsible for supporting Member States in their efforts against drugs and crime. Together, ongoing programmes in the areas of synthetic drugs monitoring, early warning and trend analysis, national forensic and counternarcotic capacity building, law enforcement operational work, and prevention and treatment provide a unique platform for contributing to the reduction of the non-medical use of synthetic opioids. UNODC's active collaboration with international organizations such as the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and Interpol; regional organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Monitoring Centre for Drug Dependence and Addiction (EMCDDA), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE); and Member States provides opportunities for leveraging the requisite expertise to address the current crisis.

The UNODC integrated strategy includes: coordinating the international response; reducing supply of opioids for non-medical use through changes in the scope of control of substances, supporting the implementation of scheduling decisions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), as well as capacity building in support of national law enforcement interventions; promoting rational use of, and access to, opioids for medical and scientific purposes; and promoting effective prevention strategies and treatment options for substance-use disorders. The strategic response brings together existing in-house programmes under one umbrella for a timely organization-wide response that leverages a unique set of coordinated activities and resources under five pillars: early warning and trend analysis; rational prescribing and ensuring access to opioids for medical and scientific use; prevention and treatment of opioid-use disorders; international law enforcement operations to disrupt illicit trafficking of opioids; and strengthening national and international counternarcotic capacity.

Additionally, UNODC in collaboration with WHO, INCB and Member States, is coordinating the development of a Toolkit to support countries in addressing the threat of synthetic drugs, in particular opioids. The Synthetic Drugs Toolkit will provide guidance on identified options for response, such as legislative and administrative measures, reducing supply for non-medical use while ensuring access for medical and scientific purposes, reducing supply of precursors used in the illicit manufacture of synthetic drugs and enhancing national forensic capacity.

1. Early Warning and Trend Analysis

Generating evidence in support of effective policy decisions and operational responses

- Monitor, analyse and report on current trends on synthetic drugs, including opioids, through the Global Synthetic Monitoring Analysis Reporting and Trends (SMART) Programme and the UNODC Early Warning Advisory (EWA) on new psychoactive substances (NPS).
- Provide comprehensive research and summaries on the nature and extent of the non-medical use of opioids, for instance through UNODC's annual flagship World Drug Report.
- Disseminate updates, further to CND resolution 61/8, on the synthetic drug market to enhance the understanding of the threats posed by fentanyl and its analogues, and tramadol through the March 2019 issue of the Global SMART Update, and sustain data sharing arrangements with INCB, WHO, WCO and other partners.
- Use the biannual synthetic drugs situation analysis reports to reflect the trends in emergence, prevalence, persistence and harms of synthetic drugs, including fentanyl analogues and tramadol, with data provided by the UNODC EWA on NPS and its recent addition, the Toxicology Portal.

2. Rational Prescribing and Access to Opioids for Medical and Scientific Use

Promoting interagency cooperation in addressing the non-medical use of opioids

- Expand programmes with WHO and INCB on promoting and improving access to pain medications.
- Foster the partnership between UNODC and WHO on targeted medical education; addressing mental health disorders; improving and strengthening prescribing of opioids and non-opioid analgesics.
- Reduce supply of opioids for non-medical use by the continuation of multilateral action to place harmful opioid substances under international control, capacity-building activities targeting frontline law enforcement and forensic personnel, and high impact operations to disrupt the supply chain.
- Sustain the support of UNODC to WHO, by supporting their work in evaluating harmful substances for scheduling, which provides the evidence base for decisions of the CND, through the sharing of information from the UNODC EWA on the emergence and toxicology of the most harmful, prevalent and persistent substances.

3. Prevention and Treatment Programmes

Strengthening and supporting prevention and treatment programmes related to opioids

- ▶ Invest in prevention and reconnect the youth and communities, in terms of education and opportunities for personal and socio-economic development, to re-establish connections and reduce inequalities.
- ▶ Increase coverage of evidence-based treatment for opioid use disorders, by providing free and immediate pharmacological and psychosocial therapies that are accessible, through continued collaboration between the UNODC Drug Prevention and Health Branch and WHO.
- ▶ Enhance collaboration between UNODC and WHO in promoting effective interventions for opioid overdoses and the management and treatment of opioid use disorders.

4. International Law Enforcement Operations to Disrupt Trafficking

Enhancing operational activities to prevent the diversion and trafficking of synthetic opioids

- ▶ Develop operational activities to disrupt the supply of synthetic opioids and the traditional opiate trade, through the UNODC Organized Crime Branch and flagship projects, such as the Container Control Programme (CCP), including the air cargo operations, and AIRCOP.
- ▶ Support the identification and tracking of shipments of pill pressing equipment in the trade supply chain, by the CCP and AIRCOP, and in partnership with operations of the WCO and INTERPOL.
- ▶ Complement interventions by activities of the CRIMJUST Programme to streamline international cooperation, and investigative cooperation between national law enforcement/criminal justice entities with counterparts along the routes of illicit trafficking of synthetic opioids, including fentanyl.
- ▶ Enhance capacity of Member States to identify, disrupt and investigate illicit trafficking, by promoting and supporting regional and inter-regional law enforcement cooperation to ensure criminal intelligence exchange; coordination of multilateral operations; capacity building in intelligence collection, collation, analysis, and sharing; implementation of special investigative

techniques; and supporting cross-border cooperation in the area of border control.

- ▶ Assist Member States in monitoring the international trade of precursor chemicals and assessing whether these substances should be placed under international control, through the INCB, and employ intelligence-led enforcement focussing on opioids by the Synthetic Opioid Project of INCB.
- ▶ Build capacity to counter the associated illicit financial flows of the criminal business model.
- ▶ Enhance capacity to investigate, trace and counter the criminal use of cryptocurrencies.
- ▶ Share operational techniques to counter drug trafficking and organized crime within a more international oriented approach in order to disrupt the flows.

5. Strengthening National and International Counternarcotic Capacity

Raising awareness, sharing best practices and promoting international cooperation

- ▶ Enhance the forensic capacity of Member States to detect and identify substances and share best practices, by providing reference samples of scheduled drugs and precursors to national institutions to facilitate laboratory analysis; regular updates of the related resources, such as the Multilingual Dictionaries, UNODC manuals and guidelines; and other publications supporting field operational work.
- ▶ Support implementation of international scheduling decisions, by engaging with source, transit and destination countries, in close collaboration of INCB, to ensure the timely implementation of international scheduling decisions, particularly the incorporation into national legislation, as required.
- ▶ Continue ongoing efforts of intra- and inter-organizational collaboration, by convening meetings dedicated to the opioid crisis mobilizing relevant institutions to identify options and system-wide synergies as a response. Such meetings include the Fifth UNODC WHO Expert Consultation on New Psychoactive Substances in September 2018, the Intergovernmental meeting on international challenges posed by the non-medical use of synthetic opioids in December 2018, and the 62nd session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2019.

The five pillars of the UNODC integrated strategy on the global opioid crisis is accompanied by a comprehensive advocacy plan, featuring an active social media campaign to highlight activities, successes and best practices in addressing the opioid crisis. This will raise public awareness on the progress of the strategy and support the visibility of the multilateral response to the crisis.

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/opioid-crisis/



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