

THE GLOBAL STATE OF HARM REDUCTION 2024

9TH
EDITION

 HARM REDUCTION
INTERNATIONAL

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Harm Reduction International (HRI) envisions a world in which drug policies uphold dignity, health and rights. We use data and advocacy to promote harm reduction and drug policy reform. We show how rights-based, evidence informed responses to drugs contribute to healthier, safer societies, and why investing in harm reduction makes sense. HRI is an NGO with Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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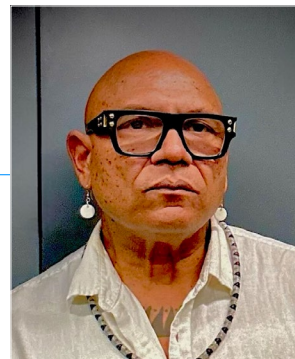
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FOREWORD

by SAM RIVERA



Love people until they are ready to love themselves. My mother, an emergency room nurse for 42 years, taught me this mantra and it guides my work everyday. I have had the honour to lead OnPointNYC as it opened one of the first two sanctioned Overdose Prevention Centres in the USA. These have now been open for nearly three years. In this time, the incredible staff at OnPoint NYC have successfully intervened in over 1,500 overdoses and prevented thousands more.

After decades practicing and providing harm reduction, it was crucial to me that, at OnPoint NYC, we continue the longstanding practices of whole person care developed by Indigenous, Black and Brown communities. This means healing the body, mind and spirit through wrap-around services, such as hygiene services, culturally nourishing food, mental health care and case management, acupuncture, sound therapy, respite spaces and strong community.

As the language of harm reduction becomes more popularised in the USA and across the globe, the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* reminds us that harm reduction is more than buzz words and services. True harm reduction is the epitome of meeting people where they are, without coercion or judgment. This requires developing a deep understanding of the people and communities we are serving.

As an Indigenous harm reductionist who is at the forefront of a cutting-edge harm reduction intervention in the USA, I am struck by how visible I am in contrast to Native people from the many lands I call home, who are made invisible by governments and institutional structures. This experience of intentional erasure through colonisation and oppression is true for so many Indigenous communities across the globe. This erasure strips us of access to our ancestral connections, healing practices and identity.

For the first time ever, the *Global State of Harm Reduction* includes a chapter dedicated to Indigenous people. The chapter looks at perceptions and practices of drug use among Indigenous people around the world and harm reduction programmes available to them. The report finds that there is still much work to do to increase access to harm reduction services among Indigenous communities, while also highlighting the ways Indigenous people blend their values, practices and knowledge with harm reduction to create interventions that support long term healing of the mind, body and spirit.

In the Kainai Nation in Canada, for example, Dr Esther Tailfeathers leads harm reduction programmes for young people, emphasising a continuum of care model that spans prevention to aftercare. Indigenous health practitioners in Australia combine Western medicine with local Indigenous knowledge and healing techniques, which includes strong community links and culturally appropriate processes.

These innovations are important examples of how we are reintegrating and reintroducing our traditional ancestral practices into our global consciousness. I believe this year's inaugural chapter will be the first of many chapters in the *Global State of Harm Reduction* exploring the contributions of Indigenous healing and the growth of advocacy to dismantle the ways colonisation has corrupted and coopted Indigenous medicine while punishing us for seeking our own wellness. As the global community will increasingly come to see, "we are the medicine".

Seneko Kakona (abundant blessings),

Sam Rivera
Executive Director, OnPointNYC

FOREWORD

by LAURA GIL



In March 2024, the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), in its 67th session, voted for the first time in its history to introduce the concept of harm reduction in a Resolution. A year prior to that, the United Nations Human Rights Council had supported harm reduction in its documents. National and local governments have been providing an array of services to people who use drugs for decades. It was time that the UN recognised the importance of harm reduction.

The *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* reminds us that harm reduction is an effective means to save lives, protect human rights and improve public health. Harm reduction is also one of the most cost-effective ways to do so.

In Colombia, we receive the latest edition of this report with cautious optimism. We celebrate international normative advances in harm reduction, the inclusion of harm reduction in 108 countries' policies, and the increase, albeit minimally, in the diversity of services at national level. Yet, we are fully aware of the challenges ahead.

At the United Nations in Vienna, the epicenter of global drug policy, a backlash on harm reduction based on the denialism of science is looming ahead. In a post-truth world, the principle of scientific-based evidence that United Nations Member States so dearly embraced in a number of CND official documents appears to have become hollow.

So many national policies that make harm reduction available continue to criminalise and stigmatise people who use drugs, or lack commitment to cultural change towards people who use drugs. Contradictions produce ineffective public policy here, there and everywhere, and, when the matter in question is drug use, ineffectiveness endangers lives.

The tightening of public finances at the national level leads to funding shortcuts for services whose beneficiaries are vulnerable populations that are distant from the priorities of national political agendas. Or governments provide funding only to public health providers, keeping community organisations from becoming first responders in harm reduction services. Harm reduction is more than a health intervention.

The lack of participation of people who use drugs, their families and their communities in the formulation and implementation of policies is concerning. People who use drugs are full citizens with the right to establish a dialogue around their needs, their expectations and the decision making around them.

Despite our efforts, Colombia remains in debt on so many of these fronts. Thirty years after personal use has been decriminalised, people who use drugs still face police action, human rights violations and suffer discrimination. The first drug consumption room opened in Colombia in 2023, yet naxolone can still only be provided by medical professionals, and funding for NGOs involved in drug checking and other services remains low. Still, if we speak honestly, that is because our commitment to harm reduction is firm.

In 2025, the Harm Reduction International Conference will be held in Bogotá, Colombia. We invite governments, national and local, civil society, researchers, and, of course, people who use drugs to join forces to ensure that harm reduction becomes a priority for all.

Laura Gil
Ambassador at large for global drug policy,
Republic of Colombia

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This is the ninth edition of the *Global State of Harm Reduction*. Every two years since 2008, Harm Reduction International (HRI) has mapped responses to drug-related health harms around the world, including HIV and viral hepatitis. The report has become a key publication for researchers, policymakers, civil society organisations, advocates and United Nations' agencies interested in mapping harm reduction policy adoption and programme implementation globally.

The *Global State of Harm Reduction* has always been produced through a collaborative effort between community and civil society representatives and researchers.

The report includes nine regional chapters authored by experts from each region. This year's report differs slightly from previous editions as we emphasise key regional issues and populations that continue to be neglected by harm reduction services. Identified through responses to the Global State of Harm Reduction survey, each regional chapter presents data on the availability of harm reduction services and addresses two key issues that require special attention. The *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* report also includes three new thematic chapters focused on harm reduction for Indigenous people, people in prison and youth. We also continue to include data to map the implementation of viral hepatitis services for people who use drugs.

In all our work, HRI defers to and respects local and regional terminology preferences, and is committed to the use of non-stigmatising, accurate language. In this regard, we take our lead from the INPUD and ANPUD *Language Statement and Reference Guide*.^a Furthermore, we are committed to being inclusive and anti-racist. We capitalise Black and Brown when referring to Black and Brown people, used in a racial, ethnic or cultural sense, and Indigenous when referring to the original inhabitants of a place.

This report and other *Global State of Harm Reduction* resources can be found at www.hri.global.

METHODS

The information presented in the regional chapters of the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* has been gathered using two primary research strategies. HRI, in collaboration with regional partners, disseminated an extensive global survey to community and civil society organisations, multilaterals, donors, service providers, programme managers and academics as well as other national and regional experts, in five languages: Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Russian. This survey sought quantitative and qualitative information on the harm reduction services available in each country, region or territory.

Researchers then undertook an extensive literature review of research papers and reports from intergovernmental organisations, multilateral agencies, international non-governmental organisations, academics, civil society, harm

^a INPUD, ANPUD (2020), *Words Matter! Language Statement & Reference Guide* [internet]. Available from www.inpud.net/en/words-matter-language-statement-reference-guide.

reduction organisations and networks of people who use drugs.

Epidemiological data in many of the regional chapters has been sourced from two global systematic reviews, supplemented by national or regional published data and experts. These reviews identified the prevalence of injecting drug use, the sociodemographic characteristics of, and risk factors for, people who inject drugs, the prevalence of blood-borne viruses^b and coverage of needle and syringe programmes (NSP), opioid agonist therapy (OAT), drug consumption rooms (DCRs), HIV testing, antiretroviral treatment (ART) and condom programmes.^c

Figures published through international reporting systems, such as those undertaken by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), may differ from those collated here. This is due to variations in the scopes of monitoring surveys, reliability criteria and regional classifications.

There are still significant gaps in the data, which serve as an important reminder of the need for a greatly improved monitoring and data reporting system on HIV and drug use around the world.

Regions have been largely defined using the coverage of regional harm reduction networks. Accordingly, this report examines Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, Eurasia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America, Oceania, West and Central Africa and Western Europe. All regional updates have been peer reviewed by experts in the field (see Acknowledgements).

The information presented in the Indigenous people, Prisons, and Youth chapters of the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* was gathered using three research strategies.

Data on the availability of harm reduction services for Indigenous people, prison-based programmes, and youth, including OAT and NSP in prisons, was collected through the *Global State of Harm Reduction* survey, which also informed the regional chapters. In addition, separate thematic surveys were employed for each new thematic chapter to gather information on barriers to access and other relevant issues specific to each focus area.

For the Indigenous people chapter, a thematic survey was distributed to Indigenous people and organisations identified as representing the Indigenous experience. This survey aimed to identify harm reduction measures or programmes for Indigenous communities, as well as gather information about their involvement in planning and implementation, and explore key factors contributing to drug-related harms among Indigenous people across the world.

For the Prisons chapter, a separate survey, available in both English and French, was sent to national experts in prison health. These experts included representatives from prison authorities, academia and civil society organisations. The survey sought to understand the delivery of harm reduction services in prisons and identify barriers to access where available. Focus countries were selected based on the availability of harm reduction services in prisons, geographical spread and the availability of suitable respondents.

To inform the Youth chapter, a thematic survey was disseminated to young members of youth-led organisations, focused on harm reduction and drug policy reform. This survey gathered data on barriers to accessing harm reduction services and drug education.

^b Degenhardt, L., et al., (2023), 'Epidemiology of injecting drug use, prevalence of injecting-related harm, and exposure to behavioural and environmental risks among people who inject drugs: a systematic review', *The Lancet Global Health*, vol. 11, no. 5, e659-672.

^c Colledge-Frisby, S., et al., (under review), 'The global coverage of interventions to prevent and manage drug-related harms among people who inject drugs: A multi-stage systematic review of the evidence', *The Lancet Global Health*.

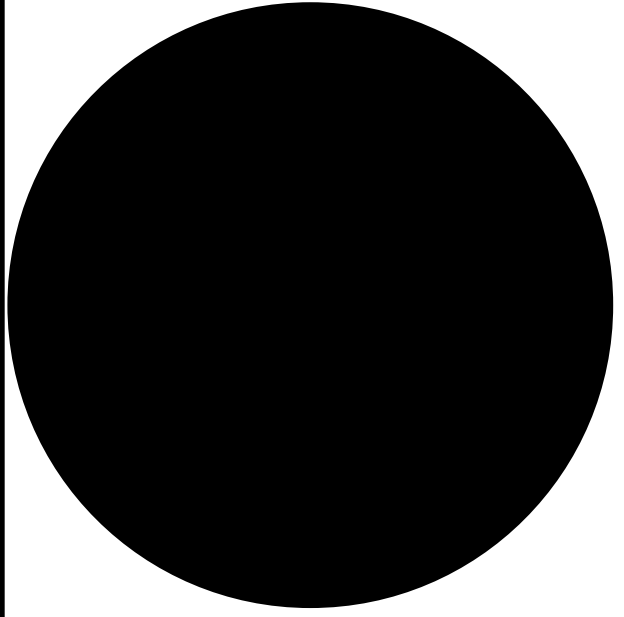
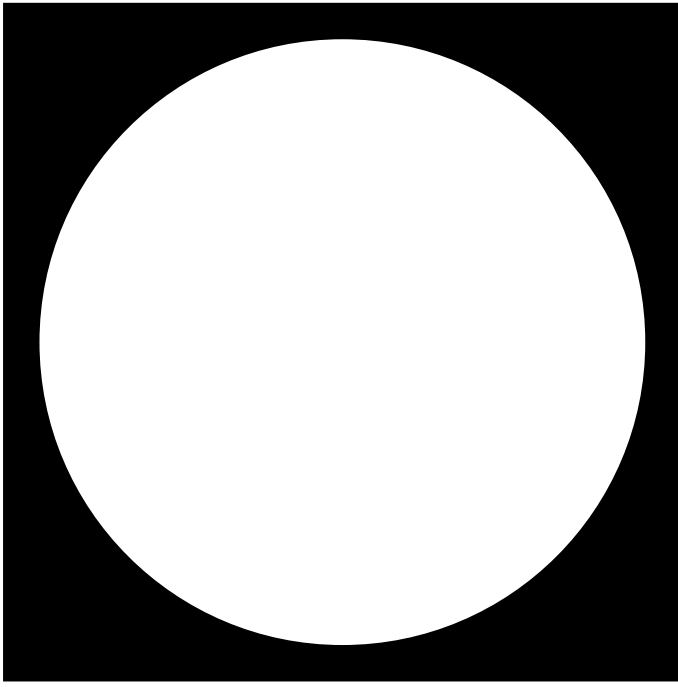
Finally, these three chapters were supplemented with desk-based research, with an emphasis on research and grey literature published since the previous edition of the report. All thematic chapters have been peer reviewed by experts in the field (see Acknowledgements).

The *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* global and thematic surveys efforts led to contributions from 284 people in 101 countries.

LIMITATIONS

The report aims to provide a global snapshot of harm reduction policies and programmes; as such it has limitations. It does not comprehensively evaluate the quality of the services in place, although where possible it does highlight areas of concern.

While the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* aims to cover important areas for harm reduction, primarily it focuses on public health aspects of the response to drug use. The report does not document all the social and legal harms people who use drugs face, nor does it cover all the health harms related to legal or illegal drug use.



GLOBAL SUMMARY

TABLE 1 COUNTRIES OR TERRITORIES EMPLOYING A HARM REDUCTION APPROACH IN POLICY OR PRACTICE

Country/territory	Explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents	At least one needle and syringe programme operational	At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational	At least one drug consumption room operational	Take-home naloxone available	At least one naloxone peer distribution programme operational	At least one safer smoking kit distribution programme	Stimulant prescription available	NSP in at least one prison	OAT in at least one prison
ASIA										
Bangladesh	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Bhutan	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Brunei Darussalam	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Cambodia	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
China	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Hong Kong	×	×	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
India	✓	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	✓
Indonesia	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Japan	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Laos	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Macau	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	✓
Malaysia	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	✓
Maldives	✓	×	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Mongolia	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Myanmar	✓	✓	✓	nd	✓	✓	×	×	×	×
Nepal	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
North Korea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Philippines	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Singapore	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
South Korea	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Sri Lanka	×	×	×	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Taiwan	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Thailand	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	×
Vietnam	✓	✓	✓	nd	×	×	×	×	×	✓
EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA										
Angola	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Botswana	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Comoros	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eritrea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eswatini	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Ethiopia	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	×
Kenya	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	✓
Lesotho	×	×	×	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Madagascar	×	×	×	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Malawi	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	nd	×	×

Country/territory	Explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents	At least one needle and syringe programme operational	At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational	At least one drug consumption room operational	Take-home naloxone available	At least one naloxone peer distribution programme operational	At least one safer smoking kit distribution programme	Stimulant prescription available	NSP in at least one prison	OAT in at least one prison
Mauritius	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Mozambique	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Namibia	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Rwanda	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Seychelles	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
South Africa	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
South Sudan	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Uganda	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
United Republic of Tanzania	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Zambia	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Zimbabwe	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
EURASIA										
Albania	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Armenia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Azerbaijan	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Belarus	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Bosnia and Herzegovina	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Bulgaria	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Croatia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Czechia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Georgia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Kazakhstan	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Kosovo	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Kyrgyzstan	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Latvia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Moldova	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Montenegro	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
North Macedonia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Romania	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Russia	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Serbia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Slovakia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗

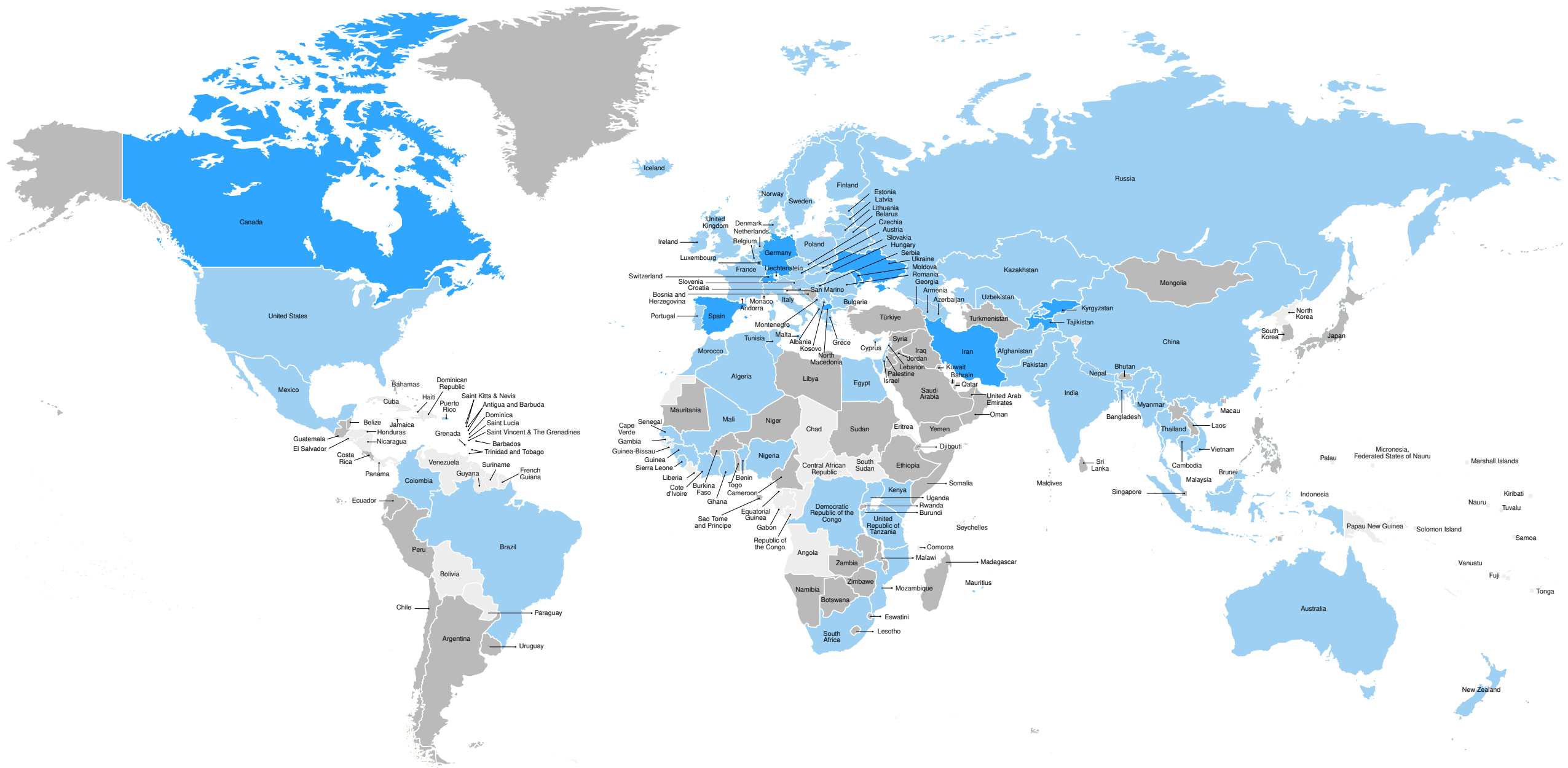
Country/territory	Explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents	At least one needle and syringe programme operational	At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational	At least one drug consumption room operational	Take-home naloxone available	At least one naloxone peer distribution programme operational	At least one safer smoking kit distribution programme	Stimulant prescription available	NSP in at least one prison	OAT in at least one prison
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Tajikistan	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Turkmenistan	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Ukraine	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
Uzbekistan	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN										
Antigua and Barbuda	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Argentina	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Bahamas	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Barbados	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Belize	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Bolivia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Brazil	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Chile	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Colombia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Costa Rica	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Cuba	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Dominican Republic	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Dominica	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Ecuador	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	nd	✗	✗
El Salvador	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Grenada	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Guatemala	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Guyana	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Haiti	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Honduras	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Jamaica	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Mexico	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Nicaragua	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Panama	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Paraguay	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Peru	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Puerto Rico	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Saint Kitts and Nevis	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Saint Lucia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

Country/territory	Explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents	At least one needle and syringe programme operational	At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational	At least one drug consumption room operational	Take-home naloxone available	At least one naloxone peer distribution programme operational	At least one safer smoking kit distribution programme	Stimulant prescription available	NSP in at least one prison	OAT in at least one prison
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Suriname	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Trinidad and Tobago	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Uruguay	✓	✗	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Venezuela	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA										
Afghanistan	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Algeria	✓	✓	✓	nd	✗	nd	✗	✗	✗	✓
Bahrain	nd	✗	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Djibouti	nd	✗	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Egypt	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Iran	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Iraq	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Israel	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Jordan	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Kuwait	nd	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Lebanon	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Libya	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Morocco	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Oman	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Pakistan	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Palestine	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Qatar	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Saudi Arabia	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Somalia	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Sudan	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Syria	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Tunisia	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
United Arab Emirates	nd	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Yemen	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
NORTH AMERICA										
Canada	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
United States of America	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓

Country/territory	Explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents	At least one needle and syringe programme operational	At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational	At least one drug consumption room operational	Take-home naloxone available	At least one naloxone peer distribution programme operational	At least one safer smoking kit distribution programme	Stimulant prescription available	NSP in at least one prison	OAT in at least one prison
OCEANIA										
Aotearoa New Zealand	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓
Australia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Federated States of Micronesia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Fiji	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Kiribati	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Marshall Islands	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Nauru	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Palau	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Papua New Guinea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Samoa	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Solomon Islands	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Timor Leste	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Tonga	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Tuvalu	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Vanuatu	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA										
Benin	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Burkina Faso	nd	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Burundi	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Cameroon	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Cape Verde	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Central African Republic	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Chad	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Congo	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Côte d'Ivoire	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Democratic Republic of the Congo	✓	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Equatorial Guinea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Gabon	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Gambia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Ghana	nd	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Guinea	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Guinea-Bissau	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Liberia	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

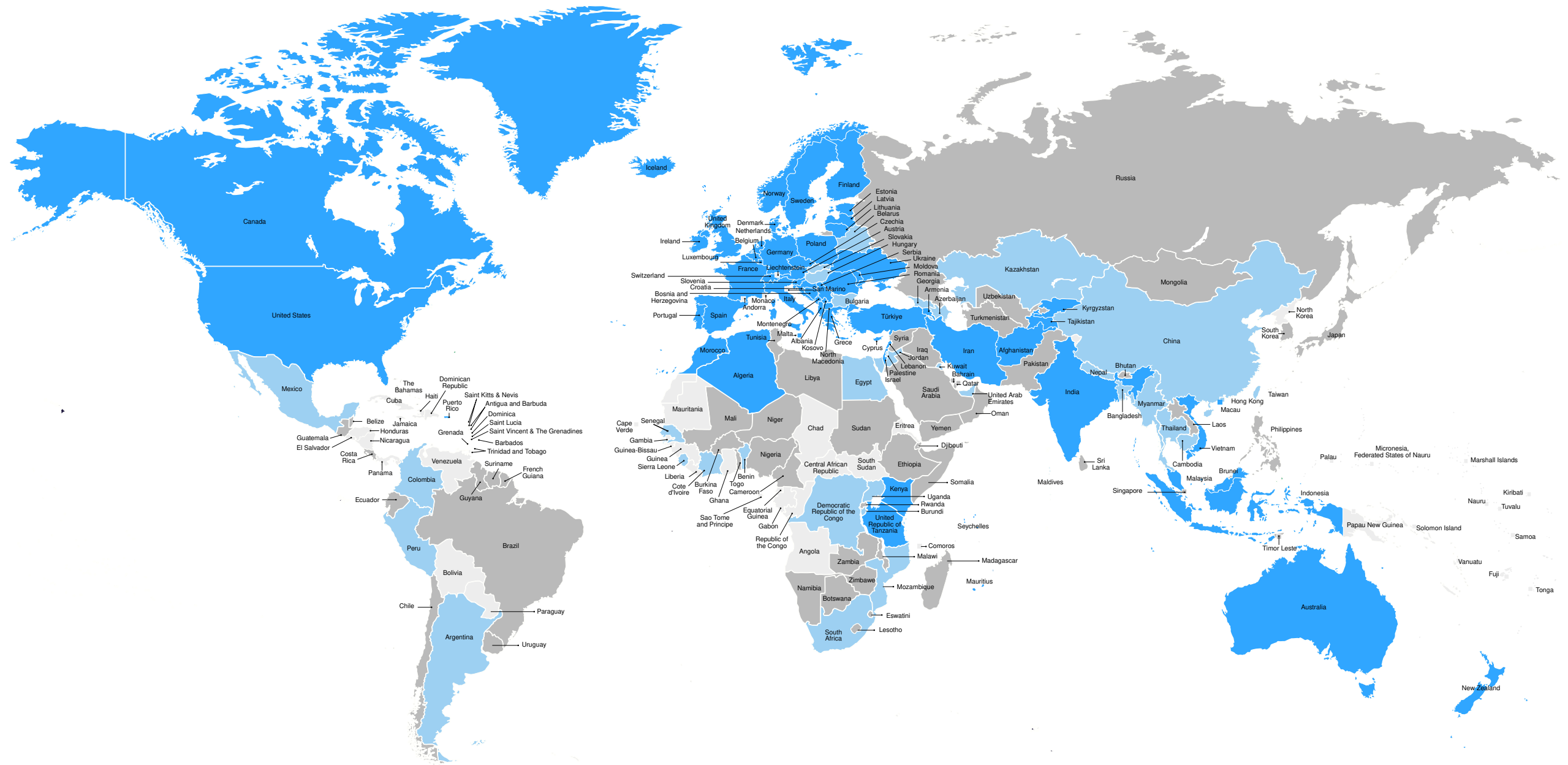
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Mali	✓	✓	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Mauritania	✗	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Niger	✗	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Nigeria	✓	✓	✗	nd	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Sao Tome and Principe	✓	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Senegal	✓	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Sierra Leone	✓	✓	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Togo	✓	✗	✗	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
WESTERN EUROPE										
Andorra	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Cyprus	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
Finland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Germany	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Greece	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Iceland	✓	✓	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd	✗	✗	✓
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Liechtenstein	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	nd	nd	✗	✓	✓
Malta	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
Monaco	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Norway	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
San Mari	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Spain	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Sweden	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
Switzerland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Türkiye	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗	nd	✗	✗	✓
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
GLOBAL TOTAL	108	93	94	18	34	23	25	6	11	60

M1.1 GLOBAL AVAILABILITY OF NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMMES (NSPs) IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN PRISONS



- NSP available in the community
- NSP available in the community and prison
- NSP not available
- No data

M1.2 GLOBAL AVAILABILITY OF OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY (OAT) IN THE COMMUNITY AND IN PRISONS



- OAT available in the community
- OAT available in the community and prison
- OAT not available
- No data

GLOBAL AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES IN 2024

NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMMES (NSPs)

93 countries have at least one NSP in 2024



- ▲ +1
- + Brazil
- + Bulgaria
- + Ghana
- Dominican Republic
- Guinea

OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY (OAT)

94 countries have at least one OAT programme in 2024

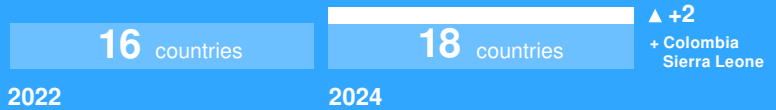


- ▲ +6
- + Benin
- + Egypt
- + Jordan
- + Kuwait
- + Peru
- + Sierra Leone
- + The United Arab Emirates
- Nigeria

GLOBAL AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES IN 2024

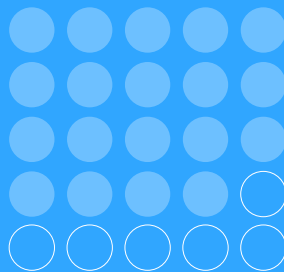
DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS (DCRs)

18 countries have legal and operational DCRs in 2024

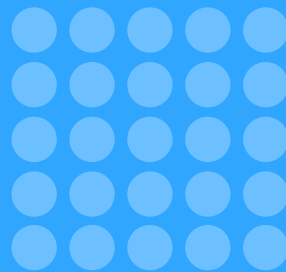


SAFER SMOKING KITS

25 countries have at least one safer smoking kit distribution programme in 2024



2022
Safer smoking equipment is distributed in at least **19 countries**



2024
Safer smoking equipment is distributed in at least **25 countries**

▲ +6
+ South Africa
+ Bulgaria
+ Mexico
+ Puerto Rico
+ Greece
+ Ireland

PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS STILL LACK HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

Overall, there has been a slight increase in the availability of harm reduction services since the *Global State of Harm Reduction* report in 2022. However, substantial regional differences still exist. The stigmatisation and criminalisation of people who use drugs remain significant issues. They impede access to existing harm reduction services and undermine the political and financial support needed to implement and expand these services.^{1,2,3}

The number of countries with at least one needle and syringe programme (NSP) has risen slightly since 2022: 93 countries now provide at least one NSP, compared to 92 in 2022.

However, there have been some changes in the countries where NSP is available. Brazil has joined the list after introducing NSPs.^{4,5} In an encouraging development in Bulgaria, NSPs are available again in two cities (Sofia and Plovdiv); they had previously closed in 2020 due to a lack of domestic funding.^{6,7} In Accra, Ghana, a pilot NSP is operational as of this year.⁸ However, in the Dominican Republic and Guinea, we can no longer confirm that NSPs are available. The need for NSPs still far outstrips availability, and the latest review finds 190 countries and territories where injecting drug use has been documented, meaning people who inject drugs in 97 countries are unable to access an NSP anywhere.^{9,10}

Having at least one NSP is a low target for countries to meet, and around the world these services need to be scaled up. According to a recent systematic review, only Oceania has high coverage of NSPs,^a and this only relates to two countries in the region (Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand). Central Asia and Western Europe both have moderate coverage, but NSP coverage is low in all other regions.¹¹ Current levels of coverage are not sufficient to effectively prevent the spread of HIV or hepatitis C virus (HCV), as they are not reaching the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended coverage level.^{12,13}

The quality of the harm reduction services that are available is also important. Here, details matter. For instance, there is evidence that low dead space syringes^b are a cost-effective tool to decrease HIV and HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs.^{14,15,16} They should be available at all NSPs,

a Coverage is defined as the number of needles and syringes distributed per person who injects drugs per year: low coverage is under 100 needles; moderate coverage is 100–199 needles; high coverage is 200 needles or above. The World Health Organization-recommended coverage to reach HCV elimination goals is 200 needles per person per year by 2025 and 300 by 2030. (Source: 10)

b Dead space is the total area of a syringe and the needle where any fluid can remain when the plunger is fully depressed. When people who inject drugs share needles and syringes, the volume of dead space determines the volume of blood that can be transferred from one person to another. In general, out of the typically available syringes at an NSP, the one-piece 1ml insulin-type syringes with fine gauge fixed needles have the smallest dead space, and the two-piece, larger volume syringes with detachable large diameter needles have the largest dead space.

but are not being provided. Harm Reduction International (HRI) conducted a mapping of the types of needles and syringes that are provided at NSPs in 26 countries around the world. It found that low- and middle-income countries are less likely to distribute low dead space syringes while high-income countries are more likely to distribute a range of needles and syringes.^{c 17}

Opioid agonist therapy (OAT) programmes are now in 94 countries, compared to 88 in 2022 – although coverage remains varied and limited.

The new countries include Egypt, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates,^{18,19} Peru, Benin and Sierra Leone,²⁰ although there is limited access. In Benin, a pilot OAT programme began at one site in the capital Porto-Novo, in December 2023.^{21,22} In Sierra Leone, there is a small-scale OAT programme led by peer educators and run by a community-led group.²³ Peru began implementing OAT, although access is again very limited and only available in medical settings.²⁴ In West and Central Africa, Nigeria, has ceased its OAT programme.²⁵

According to a systematic review, Western Europe has the highest OAT coverage with almost 70 OAT clients per 100 people who inject drugs,^d followed by Oceania (data only from Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand) and South Asia.²⁶ Coverage is only moderate in North America (where an estimated 21% of people who inject drugs receive OAT). It is low in every other region. Coverage is particularly low in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa. Across these regions, fewer than 2% of people who inject drugs have access.²⁷ OAT is prohibited by federal law in Russia despite around 90% of its 1.3 million people who inject drugs using opioids and needing access to the service.^{28,29}

The number of countries with drug consumption rooms (DCRs) remains very small, but it has increased from 16 to 18 since 2022.

The two new countries on this list are Colombia and Sierra Leone. In Colombia, the first DCR opened in 2023 in Bogotá.³⁰ The facility is a community-based service for people who inject drugs, with peers involved in the operation as well as the development, implementation and evaluation of the facility.³¹ Another DCR is expected to open in the country in 2024.³² In Sierra Leone, a drop-in centre has opened an informal DCR, also staffed by peers.³³ Although local police and donors that support the drop-in centre are aware of its operation it is not officially sanctioned or funded.³⁴ Slovenia is close to having officially-sanctioned DCRs in the country – the hard-won result of a decades of advocacy.^e In 2023, two civil society organisations were approved by Slovenia's Ministry of Health to open DCRs.³⁵ The first will open in Nova Gorica, a town in western Slovenia, and will provide services relating to sniffing, smoking and injecting. A second will open in the capital Ljubljana for sniffing only, due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure to support safer smoking.³⁶

The majority of countries that currently have DCRs are in Western Europe. A recent report by Correlation – European Harm Reduction Network reviewed 11 countries and found that support from local governments and peer involvement was key to the successful establishment and operation of DCRs.³⁷ It noted that DCRs have to adapt to changes in the profiles and needs of their target groups. For example, it found a growing need to expand DCR services to people using methamphetamine, GHB and crack cocaine, and people who inhale opioids and crack cocaine.³⁸ Another significant recent study found that DCRs can provide people who use drugs with important safe spaces to consume drugs, which

c Evidence that using high dead space syringes increases people's risk of contracting HIV and HCV due to the residual fluid in them emerged decades ago. Despite this, routine national data collection does not generally include information on the type of syringes distributed in harm reduction programmes. More should be done to monitor this. (Sources: 11-13)

d Coverage is defined as the number of people accessing OAT per 100 people who inject drugs: low coverage is defined as under 20 people; moderate coverage is 20–39 people; high coverage is 40 people or above. (Source: 10)

e The first officially sanctioned pilot facility (funded by the Ministry of Health) was due to open in 2015. However, after a two-year consideration by the National Medical Ethics Committee it was not opened due to a judgement was made that DCR staff would 'indirectly cooperate' in illegal activities. (Source: 35)

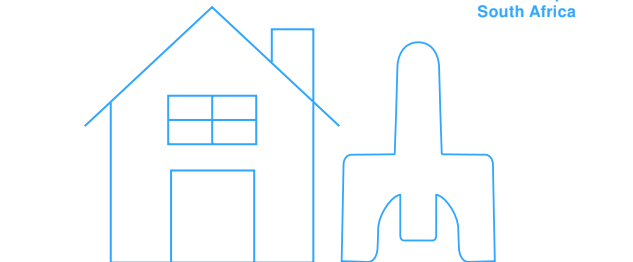
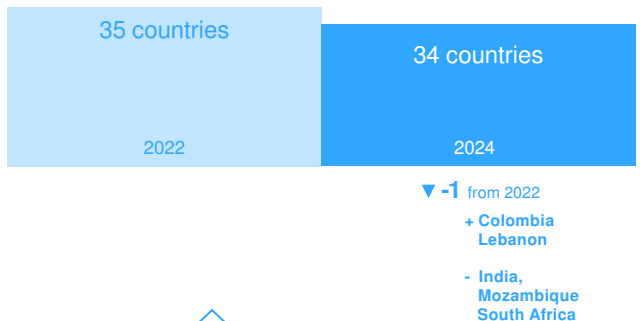
reduces the risk of death and infection, and they can also build the trust needed to connect people to other vital services.³⁹

North America’s first DCR – Insite in Vancouver, Canada – celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2023. With 3 million injection room visits since its opening, it has had no toxic drug or overdose deaths on its premises. Meanwhile, almost 12,000 overdoses have been reversed at the facility, and more than 71,000 referrals have been made to other services. This adds to decades of evidence in support of DCRs. DCRs can provide a pragmatic approach to a complex social and public health issue by saving lives directly, and indirectly by connecting people to healthcare and social welfare services.⁴⁰ There is an urgent need for greater attention and guidance on DCRs at the UN level.

Take-home naloxone programmes are now available in 34 countries, a slight decrease from 35 in 2022.

Take-home naloxone is now available in two new countries, Colombia and Lebanon.^{41,42} However, its availability in India, Mozambique and South Africa has now changed. A recent review on harm reduction services in India concluded that details about its take-home naloxone service are largely unavailable, such as programme coverage and number of services.⁴³ In South Africa, there are no community-based naloxone distribution programmes so naloxone is only available in medical settings. This is despite the fact that most people who inject drugs in South Africa use heroin and could use access to naloxone. This is a common barrier people face when trying to access naloxone.^{44,45} In Colombia, alongside the recent developments in DCR availability, take-home naloxone is now officially available, after years of illegal naloxone distribution among peers. However, legal barriers still exist as national guidelines require trained medical personnel to administer naloxone.⁴⁶

Naloxone programmes available



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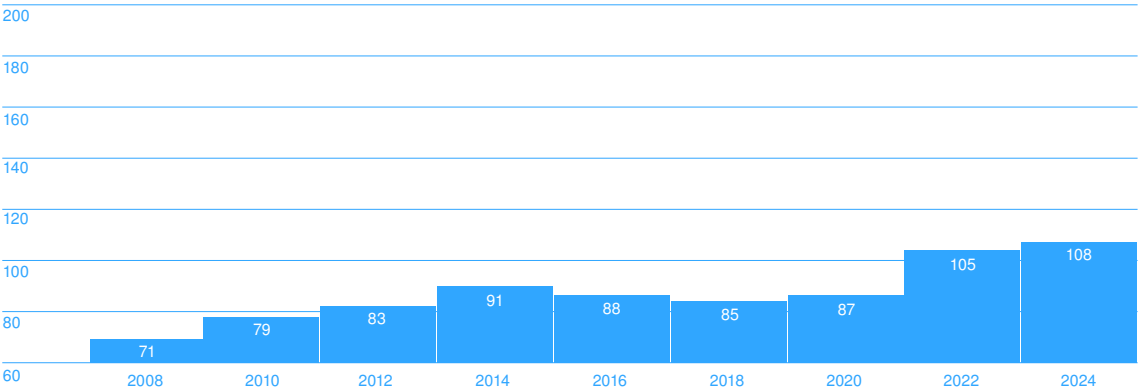
HARM REDUCTION IS CITED IN NATIONAL POLICIES, BUT PUNITIVE RESPONSES STILL DOMINATE

One hundred and eight countries include harm reduction in national policies. However, criminalisation and punitive responses to drugs remain dominant in most places. These approaches undermine harm reduction efforts and continue to fuel stigma and discrimination and deter people who use drugs from seeking vital, life-saving services.^{47,48,49,50} This key contradiction must be addressed for meaningful progress to be made.

108 countries include explicit supportive mentions of harm reduction in national policy documents (up from 105 in 2022).^f

This includes 11 countries in: Eastern and Southern Africa (Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe), Latin America and the Caribbean (Brazil, Chile and Costa Rica), West and Central Africa (Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe and Togo) and Asia (Cambodia). However, we could not confirm the continued inclusion of harm reduction in national policies in eight countries that were on the list in 2022 (Dominican Republic, Ghana, Libya, Oman, Philippines, Samoa, Syria and Vanuatu).

Number of countries with explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents in *Global State of Harm Reduction* reports, 2008-2024



^f In the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2022*, the number of countries with explicit supportive reference to harm reduction in national policy documents was 104. However, the correct total for 2022 was 105, as Uruguay was incorrectly counted as a country with no explicit references. In Uruguay, explicit supportive references to harm reduction have been included in policy documents at least since 2017, when a regulation guaranteeing the right to mental health protection (Ley N° 19529) was issued.

But supportive references to harm reduction in national policies can mean very different things in different places. For instance, in Ethiopia and Mozambique only OAT is included in national HIV plans.⁵¹ In contrast, Zimbabwe's HIV plan includes three harm reduction services (OAT, NSP and naloxone distribution). Malawi has explicit references to harm reduction in several national policy documents, including the health sector's strategic plan as well as the country's specific plans on drugs, HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).⁵² In Brazil, supportive references to harm reduction appear in several national plans (on drugs, HIV, hepatitis, and STIs), including references to different services (OAT, NSP, infectious disease care and services for non-injecting drug use).^{53,54} This is in line with international recommendations for more comprehensive responses.⁵⁵

Supportive references to harm reduction in national policies are still being undermined by underfunding and punitive responses to drugs.

The slight global increase in the number of countries where harm reduction is explicitly included in policy documents does not reflect the harsh realities that people who use drugs experience. For example, in Mozambique, where OAT is included in the national HIV plan, there have been reports of police arresting people for carrying injecting equipment.⁵⁶ In Iran, which mentions harm reduction in its national HIV policy, the government executed 459 people in 2023 for drug-related offences, the highest number since 2015.⁵⁷ In South Africa, the Networking HIV and AIDS Community of Southern Africa reported 600 human rights violations against people who use drugs in just three months in 2023 (including assaults and unlawful arrests).⁵⁸

The public health imperative for tackling punitive and prohibitive response to drugs is clear. It is well established in the scientific literature that OAT and NSP, especially when provided together, can reduce the transmission of blood-borne infection, while the criminalisation of drug use can increase HIV and HCV transmission.^{59,60} It is for this reason that in 2023 a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on drug policy included – for the first time – explicit support for harm reduction and the decriminalisation of people who use drugs.⁶¹ Similarly, in 2024, a United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs resolution on overdose was the first to explicitly mention harm reduction.⁶²

Despite the scientific evidence and increasing international recommendations, the approach to drug use continues to be dominated by punitive and coercive policies and practices.^{63,64,65} Human rights violations and repressive anti-drug campaigns continue around the world. In Asia, for instance, tens of thousands of people have been arrested for drug-related offences in Sri Lanka, and a vocal supporter of the death penalty for drug offences has been elected as President in Indonesia.^{66,67,68} Hundreds of drug-related killings have also been documented in the Philippines (post-President Duterte).^{69,70} Botswana and Nigeria have now passed laws that sanction the death penalty for drug trafficking.^{71,72,73}

INSUFFICIENT FUNDING CONTINUES TO HINDER SERVICES

Harm reduction services such as NSP and OAT are cost-effective and cost-saving public health interventions.^{74,75} They improve public health outcomes and contribute to reducing the negative social and economic impacts associated with drug use. Despite this, harm reduction is seriously underfunded in most regions.^{76,77} HRI has monitored this funding for over 15 years, and the findings have been consistently bleak. The latest research identified USD 151 million in harm reduction funding in low- and middle-income countries in 2022 – only 6% of the estimated USD 2.7 billion needed annually by 2025. This leaves a funding gap of 94%.⁷⁸ Despite global commitments and international HIV prevention guidelines supporting the scaling up of harm reduction services, funding is woefully insufficient. Harm reduction programmes accounted for only 0.7% of total HIV funding in 2022, despite 8% of new HIV infections occurring among people who inject drugs.^{79,80}

The number of international harm reduction donors remains small, leaving harm reduction vulnerable to their shifting priorities.

There is an increasing dependence on the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund). In 2022, it accounted for 73% of all donor funding for harm reduction, compared to just 31% in 2007. As it is a public health donor, this has

meant that most harm reduction funding is focused on public health outcomes (rather than other, broader issues of social justice for people who use drugs). Significantly, funding for advocacy, policy change efforts and community system strengthening has diminished. The Open Society Foundations' (OSF) funding for harm reduction, which includes such initiatives, has almost halved since 2019. In 2016 and 2019, OSF was the largest international harm reduction donor outside of the Global Fund and the United States' President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).⁸¹

Cuts to support have also been reported by community groups around the world. For example, the Uganda Harm Reduction Network reported that at least three donors have ended harm reduction funding in Uganda since 2022.⁸²

Community groups led by key populations, including people who use drugs^g, continue to face structural barriers, including complicated reporting requirements. This limits their access to funding. The majority of donors do not record data on their funding for community-led organisations, and there are no mechanisms to hold donors or donor governments accountable for their political commitments to international agreements like the Global AIDS Strategy or the UN resolution on the human rights implications of drug policy.^{83,84}

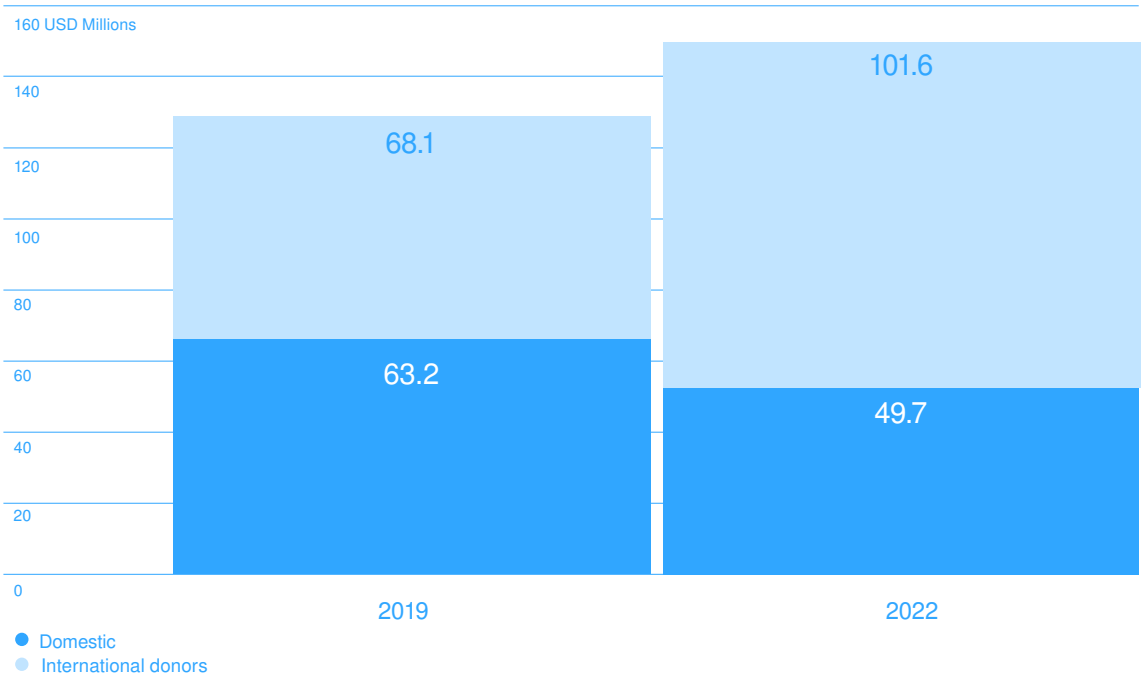
^g UNAIDS considers gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs, and prisoners and other incarcerated people as the five main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

Domestic funding for harm reduction is even more fragile, and a lack of data prevents civil society from being able to monitor levels and hold governments accountable.

HRI’s latest research identified USD 49.7 million in domestic funding for harm reduction, representing 33% of all harm reduction funding identified in 2022 and a reduced amount since 2019. Domestic investment in harm reduction accounted for a mere 0.4% of all domestic funding for HIV in 2022. HIV spending on key populations lags far behind the estimated need across all regions but particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. There is also little transparency around domestic government spending in many countries, including on harm reduction services, making it hard to monitor and hold officials to account.⁸⁵

Increased funding for advocacy efforts could help change this situation and increase domestic investment for sustainable harm reduction responses. Decriminalising drug use and people who use drugs will maximise the impact of existing harm reduction investments. For example, in Portugal, the number of people who use drugs entering treatment has increased significantly since decriminalisation in 2000.⁸⁶ Drug-related deaths have also fallen and have remained below the European Union (EU) average ever since decriminalisation.⁸⁷ The country now accounts for 1.7% of new HIV diagnoses linked to injecting drug use in the EU. Prior to decriminalisation, it accounted for 50%.⁸⁸ This reflects the health, social and economic benefits of investing in harm reduction and how harm reduction programmes, and repealing punitive drug laws and policies, benefits wider communities.

Amount of harm reduction funding (USD millions) by funding source in 2019 and 2022



THE MOST UNDERSERVED GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Some people who use drugs face multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities which impede their access to harm reduction services. This includes women, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous people, migrants and people in prison. In addition to stigmatisation because of their drug use, these groups are already marginalised and discriminated against. This results in them being particularly underserved. Young people who use drugs also face additional barriers to accessing services.

Language can also be a significant barrier for migrants who need access to harm reduction services.⁸⁹ Interpreters and multicultural mediators are needed to ensure migrants who use drugs can access harm reduction services.^{90,91}

Harm reduction for people aged below 18 years is still seen as a controversial issue.^{92,93,94}

There are age restrictions to accessing harm reduction services in many countries around the world. In Western Europe, where harm reduction has a longer history than other regions and the policy environment is generally more favourable, under 18s are not formally permitted to use DCRs, NSPs or drug checking services.^{95,96,97,98}

Indigenous people and people from other racialised communities face racism on top of stigmatisation for drug use.

Rates of drug-related harm are higher for Indigenous people, according to research from Canada, the USA, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.⁹⁹ For example, opioid overdose deaths are seven times higher for Kainai peoples in Alberta, Canada than for the general population.^{100,101,102}

Uneven geographical coverage of harm reduction services is still a serious barrier to access around the world.¹⁰³

Even where these services exist and are recognised as important at the national level, people living in remote or rural areas still find them hard to access. For example, in India, 95% of people who inject drugs are covered by harm reduction services in 12 states, while only 22% are covered by these services in the state of Assam and 39% in Delhi.^{104,105} Having to travel long distances to access services reduces or even nullifies their value to these underserved groups. Most OAT services, for instance, require daily visits.¹⁰⁶

Punitive drug policies have led to the overrepresentation of people who use drugs in prisons, where access to harm reduction services is even more inadequate.

An estimated one-third to half of people in prison have a history of drug use.^{107,108,109} Many people continue or start injecting drugs while in prison, and high-risk behaviours such as sharing paraphernalia and unsafe tattooing also increase in prison and other closed settings.¹¹⁰ Despite the evident need for harm reduction services in prisons, they are typically even less likely to be available than they are outside prison. For instance, only 11 countries have an NSP in at least one prison – this is just 12% of the 93 countries that provide NSPs to people outside of prison. Apart from Canada, all identified NSPs in prisons are in Eurasia (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine) and Western Europe (Spain, Luxembourg, Germany, and Switzerland). Naloxone is available in at least one prison in just 11 countries across Europe, North America and Australia.¹¹¹

Globally, OAT in prisons is available in at least 60 countries. However, the availability of this service varies widely between regions. In Asia, only five countries provide OAT in at least one prison. In most European and Eurasian countries, OAT is available in at least some prisons. But services are not always equally accessible within these countries. People often experience administrative and bureaucratic barriers that stop them from getting the services they need, for example, prison-based OAT being limited to people who had prescriptions before being incarcerated.^{112,113}

DRUG CHECKING SERVICES AND HARM REDUCTION FOR STIMULANTS

Another major gap globally is the lack of diverse harm reduction services to match the diversity of drugs being used around the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, stimulant drugs are more frequently used than opioids. Yet the availability of harm reduction interventions for these substances is insufficient.^{114,115,116} Some civil society organisations run peer-led drug-checking initiatives designed for stimulants in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia and Mexico,^h but these interventions are typically unsanctioned and lack official government support.¹¹⁷

Drug checking services help people who use drugs to reduce the risks associated with unknown types or quantities of substances and unwanted interactions.

These services have traditionally been aimed at people who use stimulants in the nightlife scene.¹¹⁸ In Western Europe, where drug checking services are available in 12 countries, these services have also produced data and information on the substances available and emerging trends across the region.^{119,120,121} In Eurasia, where nine countries have introduced drug checking services to some extent, they all appear to be operating in a legally grey area. An exception is Slovenia, where drug checking services are part of a National Early Warning System on psychoactive substances. In Hungary, Estonia, Czechia, Croatia, Lithuania, Georgia, Ukraine and

Poland, drug checking services distribute reagent test kits (mostly in nightlife settings), people perform tests themselves and are invited to come back to discuss the results.¹²²

Safer smoking initiatives are another harm reduction intervention that can be beneficial for people who use stimulants, as smoking can make people more susceptible to respiratory illnesses and viral infections, especially if people use makeshift pipes.¹²³

These initiatives could be part of a beneficial package of harm reduction strategies for people who inject drugs, offering alternatives to injecting.¹²⁴ We can report that safer smoking equipment is distributed in at least 25 countries, up from 19 in 2022, with new smoking equipment distribution initiatives reported in Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Mexico, Puerto Rico and South Africa. This is an important though limited development. People who smoke drugs are a seriously underserved subpopulation of people who use drugs. For example, in Africa, we can identify only one country that makes safer smoking equipment available (South Africa). Similarly in Asia, we can report availability in only one country (Indonesia).¹²⁵

^h These civil society organisations are Corporación Acción Técnica Social in Colombia, Integración Social Verter A. C in Mexico, Imaginario 9 in Uruguay, EPSJV/Fiocruz in Brazil, Intercambios Asociación Civil in Argentina, Proyecto Soma in Perú and Reduciendo Daño in Chile.

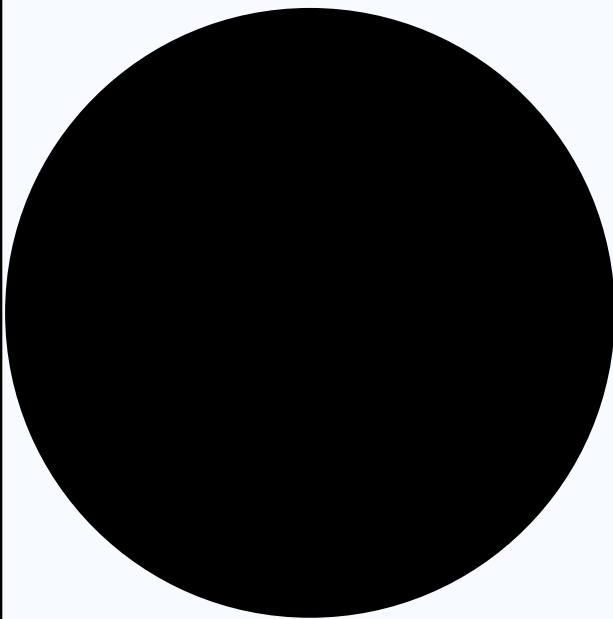
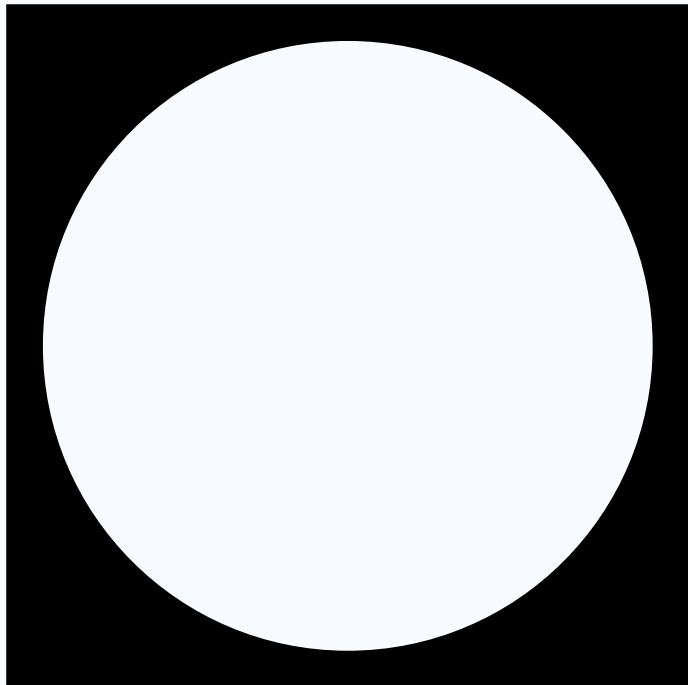
Stimulant prescription or stimulant substitution treatment has risen since 2022.

Six countries report it as available to some extent (Australia, Canada, Czechia, Mexico, Switzerland and Ukraine) compared to two countries in 2022. However, these tend to be pilot programmes (Ukraine and Switzerland) or off-label prescriptions of already available medications (typically obesity or ADHD medications). The only exception is Czechia, where there is a relatively new, official protocol on stimulant prescription which was approved during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²⁶

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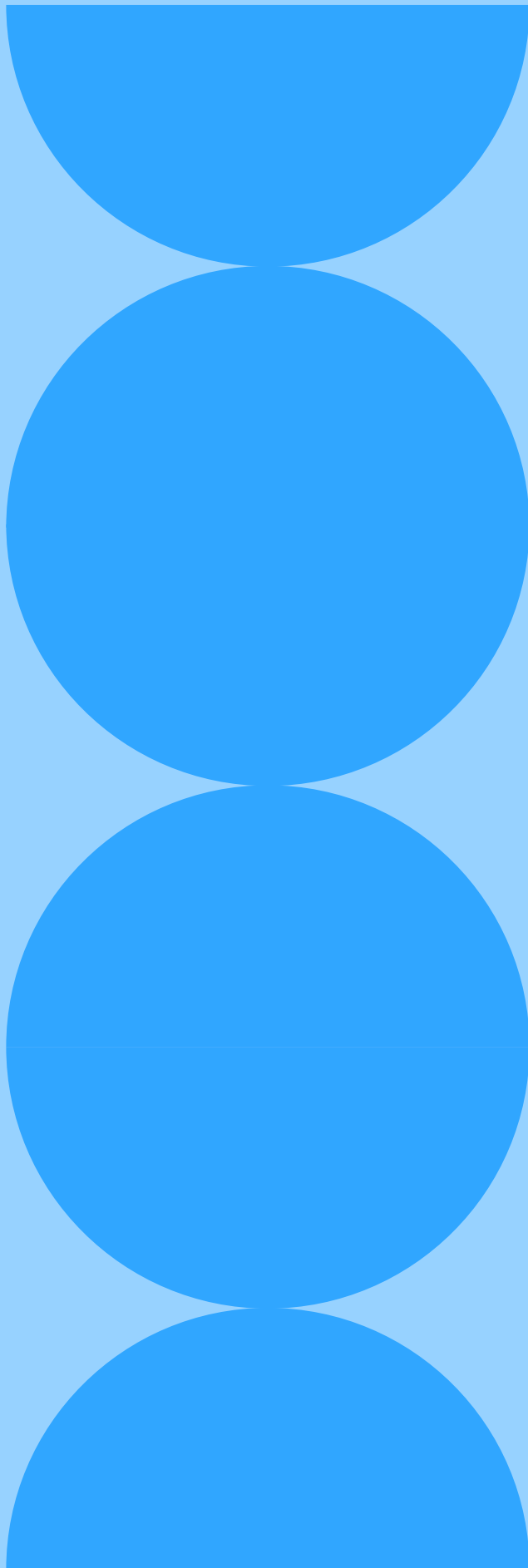
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THEMATIC CHAPTERS

THEMATIC CHAPTER: HEPATITIS



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Dr Robert Csák is a sociologist and researcher. His research has focused on the various aspects of harm reduction. He has worked in needle and syringe programmes, done community outreach, HIV and HCV testing and counselling for over 10 years. He has worked on the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2020 and 2022* and is the author of Harm Reduction International's report on Low Dead Space Syringes.

HEPATITIS

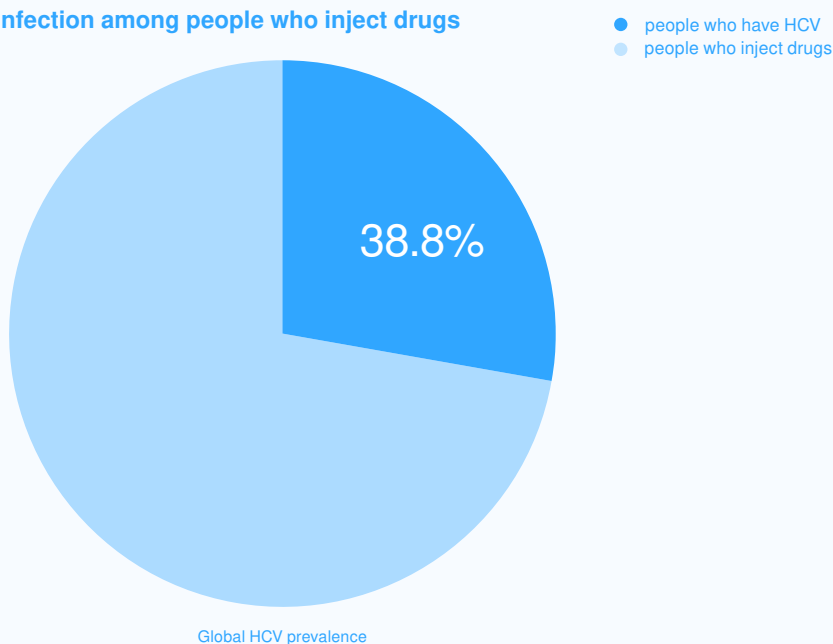
People who use drugs are at greater risk of acquiring hepatitis B and hepatitis C. This can be related to sharing drug use equipment as well as sexual activities. Harm reduction interventions are essential to the global commitment to eliminate hepatitis C by 2030.

ELIMINATION TARGETS OUT OF REACH

People who inject drugs are disproportionately affected by hepatitis C virus (HCV). According to the latest estimate published in *The Lancet* in 2023, the global prevalence of current HCV infection among people who inject drugs is 38.8%. This means that around 5.8 million people who inject drugs are living with HCV.¹ There are considerable regional

differences in HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs. The highest prevalence^a is in Eastern Europe where 48.4% of people who inject drugs have HCV (1.1 million), while the lowest is in the two regions of Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa where combined prevalence is 15.3% (192,000).^{b,2,3} The largest number of people who inject drugs with HCV is found in East and Southeast Asia, where 1.5 million people are living with the virus (a prevalence of 40.1%).⁴

Global prevalence of HCV infection among people who inject drugs



a Prevalence rates in this chapter refer to current HCV infection rates among people who inject drugs, unless otherwise stated.

b HCV prevalence data was available for only 13 countries out of 47 in the two regions (Eastern and Southern Africa; West and Central Africa).

People who inject drugs sharing contaminated injecting equipment drives infections, contributing to an estimated 43.6% of new HCV infections globally.⁵ A World Health Organization (WHO) analysis indicates that 10 countries account for nearly 80% of all global HCV infections among people who inject drugs, with the most infections occurring in the USA, followed by, China, Russian Federation, India, Ukraine, Italy, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Japan and Pakistan.⁶

Most countries are off course to reach WHO viral hepatitis elimination targets.^{7,8} Only 14 countries are on track to reach these goals (Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Iceland, Malta, Norway, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia), most of which are high-income countries.⁹

Viral hepatitis is still one of the leading causes of infectious disease deaths worldwide. This is despite effective hepatitis B virus (HBV) vaccines having been available for more than four decades. And it is despite chronic HCV being a curable health condition due to the availability of tolerable (interferon free) direct-acting antiviral therapies, with cure rates above 95%, and the costs of diagnosis and treatment continuing to fall.¹⁰ Globally, 90% of HBV infections remain undiagnosed, and 98% of HBV infections have not been treated.^{11,12}

The situation is marginally better for HCV but still dire: 79% of infections remain undiagnosed, and 87% of infections have not been treated.^{13,14} One of the main reasons for this lack of progress is that HCV disproportionately affects marginalised populations, people who inject drugs and people who are in prison and other closed settings, and HCV prevention, treatment and harm reduction among people who inject drugs is not implemented at scale.^{15,16,17}

According to the latest available data, which covers 61% of people who inject drugs worldwide, fewer than half (47%) have ever tested for HCV.¹⁸ In most countries with available data, fewer than 25% of people who inject drugs living with HCV receive treatment.¹⁹

People who inject drugs are often neglected in HBV prevention efforts even though drug use is included in international guidelines as a risk factor for HBV. This has been the case since at least 2012, when it was included in WHO's guidelines on viral hepatitis and position paper on HBV vaccination.^{20,21,22}

The persistent stigmatisation of people who use drugs, and the criminalisation of drug use, creates and maintains barriers that prevent people who use drugs from accessing services, leaving them behind in efforts to eliminate hepatitis.^{23,24,25} At least seven countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei, Croatia, Guyana, Libya, North Macedonia, Uruguay)^c require people to abstain from drug use in order to receive HCV treatment, despite there being no evidence to support this approach.²⁶

HCV elimination targets cannot be achieved without implementing harm reduction programmes.

The WHO has developed indicators to help countries monitor and assess their progress toward eliminating viral hepatitis. Indicators relating to needle and syringe programmes (NSP) and opioid agonist therapy (OAT) were included as core indicators.^d This means data on these indicators should be feasible

c There is no data on HCV treatment restrictions in Albania, Bolivia, China and the Philippines, so no conclusions can be made on whether these countries use abstinence as a prerequisite for treatment.

d NSP-related indicator: number of needles and syringes distributed per person who injects drugs per year. OAT-related indicator: coverage of opioid agonist therapy among people who inject drugs.

to collect, monitor and track in most contexts.²⁷ This adds to the long line of international guidelines and recommendations that consistently include harm reduction services among the interventions that are crucial to prevent the spread of blood-borne viruses and reach global viral hepatitis and HIV targets.^{28,29,30} The global targets for viral hepatitis elimination include an indicator for people who inject drugs. This sets a 2025 target for reducing annual new HCV

infections among people who inject drugs to 3 per 100 persons and 2 per 100 persons by 2030.³¹ It is clear that the public health steps needed to reach these goals involves embracing harm reduction and community-based services. The WHO explicitly recommends integrating HCV testing and treatment into harm reduction services.^{32,33}

Box 1: Harm reduction-related global viral hepatitis target indicators ¹²⁸

Indicator	Target	Calculation	
Coverage of NSP at population level	At least 300 syringes and needles distributed per person who injects drugs per year	Number of sterile needles and syringes distributed in the past 12 months by NSPs (data can include the number of needles/syringes sold to people who inject drugs by pharmacies or other outlets in the reporting period)	Divided by population-size estimate of people who inject drugs in relevant geographical area at country level
Coverage of OAT among people who inject drugs	At least 40% of people who inject drugs receive opioid agonist therapy	Estimated number of people who inject drugs who are receiving OAT in the reporting year or the latest year with available data	Divided by Estimated number of opioid-dependent people who inject drugs in the country in the reporting year or the latest year with available data

“The persistent stigmatisation of people who use drugs, and the criminalisation of drug use, creates and maintains barriers that prevent people who use drugs from accessing services, leaving them behind in efforts to eliminate hepatitis.”

To eliminate HCV, enhanced models of care for people who inject drugs are needed. HCV care must address the unique barriers that people who inject drugs face when trying to access HCV care at the individual, provider and systems level. A recent systematic review found that

integrating HCV care into services already being accessed by people who inject drugs, plus peer support, on-site HCV rapid tests and providing ‘patient navigators’ improves linkage to care.³⁴

A patient navigator is a person who supports individuals receiving healthcare by identifying the barriers they face and providing extra support as needed. This is especially important, given the substantial stigma, discrimination and inhumane treatment people who use drugs can experience in healthcare settings. The study also found that integrated care, motivational interviewing and on-site HCV rapid tests increased HCV treatment initiation.³⁵

To effectively address the barriers to care that people who use drugs face, combined and varied interventions are needed. This can include patient education to improve people who use drugs’ understanding of HCV and HCV treatment, patient navigation, peer support and testing/treatment reminders.³⁶ Harm reduction organisations are equipped to implement these services, and many already do; some despite unfavourable national policy environments.

To substantially increase access to testing and treatment for viral hepatitis (and HIV and sexually transmitted infections), stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings needs to significantly decrease so that everyone can access the services they need. An inclusive, non-discriminatory and supportive environment for these services is one of the key actions the WHO recommends to advance

a public health approach and reach elimination goals, especially in low- and middle-income countries.³⁷ Harm reduction services, especially community-based and community-led ones, provide exactly that. Most recent guidelines and strategies strongly recommend decentralising the delivery of care and treatment to enable more people from key populations^e to access services and to increase community engagement in relation to advocacy and service delivery.³⁸ This makes harm reduction programmes an obvious choice. To achieve this, governments need to do more to partner with harm reduction organisations to give them a greater role in reaching public health goals, accompanied by adequate funding.

e UNAIDS considers gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs, and prisoners and other incarcerated people as the five main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

HEPATITIS BY REGION^c

^c The below subsections are based on the regions used by the *Global State of Harm Reduction* which are different from other regional systems (for example UN regions); cited articles and reports might used.

Asia

The latest data estimates HCV prevalence to be between 34-40% (40.1% in East and Southeast Asia, 34.5% in South Asia). HBV prevalence is estimated to be between 6.6-16.1% (16.1% in East and Southeast Asia, 6.6% in South Asia). This suggests HCV prevalence is increasing since the last estimate in 2017.³⁹ Indonesia has the highest HCV prevalence at 67%; this equates to a significant number of people as an estimated 200,000 people inject drugs in the country.^{40,41} However, the highest absolute number of people who inject drugs who have HCV in the region can be found in China. There, 2.5 million people inject drugs and HCV prevalence among this population is estimated to be 35.8%.⁴² The proportion of people living with viral hepatitis in China who have been diagnosed has risen; between 2016 and 2022, it increased from 19% to 24% for HBV and from 22% to 33% for HCV.⁴³ Although this progress is encouraging, integrating HCV testing and treatment into harm reduction programmes and substantially increasing harm reduction programme coverage among people who inject drugs are crucial steps that need to be taken to reach WHO elimination goals.⁴⁴

The region is far from reaching HCV testing and treatment elimination targets. By 2025, the regional goal is for 60% of people with HCV to be diagnosed and 50% of people diagnosed to have received treatment.⁴⁵ Currently, it is estimated that 26.8% of people who inject drugs in East and Southeast Asia have ever tested for HCV, and only 5% of people who inject drugs in South Asia have tested.⁴⁶ Testing rates vary substantially between countries, from 4.3% of people who inject drugs in Indonesia having ever tested for HCV compared to 57.3% in Malaysia. Asia has the lowest proportion of people who inject drugs who have ever received HCV treatment of any region in the world (1.9% in East and Southeast

Asia, 2% in South Asia; no data is available from Central Asia).⁴⁷ Linked to its relative success with HCV testing, Malaysia has the highest proportion of people who inject drugs receiving HCV treatment in the region at 35.7%.⁴⁸

In Indonesia, scaling up HCV screening for people at increased risk of HIV, such as people who inject drugs and sex workers, and decentralising hepatitis services are major challenges that are hindering progress on eliminating hepatitis.⁴⁹ To improve hepatitis services in the country, the Ministry of Health has collaborated with a local NGO to prepare a national guideline on community-led monitoring of HBV and HCV services and plans for it to be included in the budget of the *National Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis 2025-2029*.^{50,51,52}

In India, the country with the second biggest HCV epidemic in the world, the data gap is significant and is a major barrier to progress towards hepatitis elimination.⁵³ HCV prevalence estimates among people who inject drugs are not available in the majority of Indian states.^{54,55} The coverage of harm reduction services is inadequate; NSP is only available in some states, while in most states OAT services reach fewer than 10% of people who inject drugs, and in the southern states coverage falls below 2%.^{56,57} In Manipur, India a community-led organisation run by and for people who inject drugs, which provides HCV screening, diagnosis and treatment, implemented a same day test and treat programme. This enabled people who inject drugs to receive HCV screening, RNA testing, complete laboratory evaluation and to start antiviral treatment on the same day. HBV vaccination was also provided for those who were eligible. This programme shows that community-led, comprehensive viral hepatitis care is feasible to implement in resource-constrained settings and that it works. This non-stigmatizing, streamlined care was delivered within a supportive healthcare system and social environment and improved the treatment cascade for people who inject drugs, from HCV diagnosis to treatment.⁵⁸

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Bangladesh	33.2	7
Bhutan	nd	nd
Brunei Darussalam	nd	nd
Cambodia	30.4	nd
China	71.6	19.6
Hong Kong	nd	nd
India	44.71	19.2
Indonesia	89.2	nd
Japan	36.4	8.6
Laos	nd	nd
Macau	39	12
Malaysia	55.2	2.9
Maldives	nd	nd
Mongolia	nd	nd
Myanmar	56	7.7
Nepal	13.3	0.8
North Korea	nd	nd
Philippines	35.2	7.12
Singapore	47	nd
South Korea	39.7	4
Sri Lanka	6.2	0.1
Taiwan	93.1	20.8
Thailand	42.2	3.5
Vietnam	72.51	17.07

Eastern and Southern Africa; West and Central Africa

Although the 2023 *Lancet* review covered more countries in Eastern and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa than previous reviews, the data gap is still substantial. Out of the 47 countries included from the two regions, data on HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is only available from 13 countries while HBV prevalence data is available from 10.⁵⁹ The latest estimate on HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs across both regions is 15.3%, indicating no substantial change since 2017 when prevalence was 16.3%. HBV prevalence across both regions is 6.9%.^{60,61} Out of the countries with available data, Mauritius has the highest HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs at 67.5%.⁶²

Across both regions, only 6.1% of people who inject drugs are estimated to have ever tested for HCV, but again the evidence is limited as this is only based on data from six countries (Burundi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, Uganda and Tanzania).⁶³ The lack of data means the proportion of people who inject drugs who have received HCV treatment is unknown, something that seriously undermines efforts to assess progress towards HCV elimination. Comprehensive data on HCV testing and linkage to care among people who inject drugs is urgently needed so that strategies and interventions to enhance these vital services can be developed and evaluated.⁶⁴

The consequences of data gaps and inadequate implementation of viral hepatitis-related services in the region is clearly demonstrated in Zimbabwe. The *Zimbabwe National Drug Master Plan (2020-2025)* includes harm reduction, but national laws and regulations are strongly punitive and harm reduction

services for people who use drugs are unavailable in the country.^{65,66,67} Research in Zimbabwe among people who use drugs found that 90% of study participants did not know what HCV is, and only half of those who were aware of HCV could identify transmission routes.^{68,69}

The Egyptian government supports elimination efforts in the region. For example, in Ghana, testing and treatment for viral hepatitis have historically been very low due to the high service costs and limited access to treatment. But after receiving HCV treatment drugs from Egypt, the Ghanaian government launched the STOP Hep C Ghana Project, which offers HCV treatment for free across the country at all levels of care and has reached 50,000 people.^{70,71} But this does not mean the initiative has reached people who inject drugs as the proportion of people who inject drugs ever tested for HCV is estimated to be between 0.0-1.7%. This low testing rate is likely to be linked to extremely limited harm reduction programmes in Ghana, which means there are no community-based HCV testing and treatment services for people who use drugs.^{72,73,74}

In South Africa, a non-profit primary healthcare facility has designed and evaluated a decentralised, simplified, complete point-of-service model to screen and link people who inject drugs to HIV and HCV care.⁷⁵ The programme provided harm reduction services (including OAT and harm reduction packs) alongside adherence support in the form of directly observed HCV therapy and peer support. Weekly financial allowances were offered to people receiving the service to reimburse transport costs and their time. Out of the 67% of people who tested

HCV-antibody positive, 81% were assessed as eligible for therapy, and 93% of those eligible initiated it.⁷⁶ This programme shows that a decentralised, person-centered harm reduction strategy can bridge gaps in treatment access for people who use drugs.⁷⁷ However, to ensure the effectiveness of such interventions, community- and peer-led outreach campaigns, with collaborative treatment support and referrals, are needed alongside sustained, unrestricted access to harm reduction services, such as OAT, to decrease the risk of reinfection.⁷⁸

Eastern and Southern Africa

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Angola	nd	nd
Botswana	nd	nd
Comoros	nd	nd
Eritrea	nd	nd
Eswatini	nd	nd
Ethiopia	3.4	5.1
Kenya	20	3.9
Lesotho	nd	nd
Madagascar	5.6	5.3
Malawi	nd	nd
Mauritius	90	3.5
Mozambique	43.6	24.2
Namibia	nd	nd
Rwanda	nd	nd
Seychelles	79.1	0.3
South Africa	55	5
South Sudan	nd	nd
Uganda	2	8.4
United Republic of Tanzania	23.1	6.9
Zambia	nd	3.2
Zimbabwe	nd	nd

West and Central Africa

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Benin	nd	nd
Burkina Faso	nd	nd
Burundi	5.5	9.4
Cameroon	nd	nd
Cape Verde	nd	nd
Central African Republic	nd	nd
Chad	nd	nd
Congo	nd	nd
Côte d'Ivoire	1.8	10.5
Democratic Republic of the Congo	nd	nd
Equatorial Guinea	nd	nd
Gabon	nd	nd
Gambia	nd	nd
Ghana	2.3	nd
Guinea	nd	nd
Guinea-Bissau	nd	nd
Liberia	nd	nd
Mali	nd	nd
Mauritania	nd	nd
Niger	nd	nd
Nigeria	5.8	6.7
Sao Tome and Principe	nd	nd
Senegal	39.3	nd
Sierra Leone	nd	nd
Togo	nd	nd

Eurasia

Viral hepatitis prevalence among people who inject drugs remains steady in the region. It is estimated at 49.1% in Eastern Europe (48.6% in 2017) and 39.3% in Central Asia (40.5% in 2017).^{79,80} HBV prevalence among people who inject drugs is 7.5% in Eastern Europe (7.9% in 2017) and 8.1% in Central Asia (9.3% in 2017). Romania has the highest HCV prevalence rate at 62.9%, although Russia has the largest number of people who inject drugs who are living with HCV (a 53.2% HCV prevalence rate among 1.3 million people who inject drugs).⁸¹

Data on the proportion of people who inject drugs who have ever tested for HCV is scarce in Central Asia. Data is only available in Tajikistan which reports a testing rate of 4%.⁸² In Eastern Europe, the rate is 71.2%, the fourth largest across the WHO regions.⁸³ In Eastern Europe, there are considerable differences between countries. Two countries, Estonia and Lithuania, have reached HCV testing coverage of 90%, but in Romania only 38.2% of people who inject drugs have ever tested for HCV.⁸⁴ Treatment coverage among people who inject drugs who are living with HCV is estimated to be 21.3% in Eastern Europe, although this data only covers three countries (27.1% in Estonia, 24.8% in Georgia, 19.8% in Ukraine), amounting to 18% of people who inject drugs in Eastern Europe.⁸⁵ No data is available from Central Asia on the proportion of people who inject drugs who have received HCV treatment.

Russia has the 10th largest HCV epidemic in the world, and faces serious barriers to elimination. Although the government has approved a national action plan for eliminating HCV, the cost of treatment is prohibitively high (especially for marginalised populations like people who inject drugs), and this is restricting HCV treatment uptake.⁸⁶ Insufficient public awareness of the problem is another important barrier to reaching elimination goals.⁸⁷

Ukraine is among the 20 countries in the world with the largest HCV epidemics. National hepatitis guidelines were updated in 2020, highlighting the importance of scale-up and decentralised care, and the number of treatment centres increased substantially resulting in HCV treatment demands being met for the first time. However, the ongoing war, which escalated in 2022, derailed elimination efforts. According to a recent report on HCV elimination, insufficient hepatitis care and imperfect epidemiological data are major barriers to Ukraine reaching elimination goals.⁸⁸

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Albania	56	18
Armenia	49.2	nd
Azerbaijan	59.3	7.9
Belarus	59	9.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina	30.8	2.5
Bulgaria	78.3	5.9
Croatia	30.7	3.1
Czechia	37.7	0
Estonia	73	5
Georgia	32.1	2.5
Hungary	35.9	1
Kazakhstan	58.6	8.3
Kosovo	23.8	5
Kyrgyzstan	64.5	11.3
Latvia	51.3	0.4
Lithuania	85.9	4.9
Moldova	42.7	5.4
Montenegro	62.8	1.4
North Macedonia	65.4	5.6
Poland	57.9	2.9
Romania	72.7	3.2
Russia	72.5	nd
Serbia	61.4	10.5
Slovakia	32.5	6.3
Slovenia	25	4.2
Tajikistan	61.3	2
Turkmenistan	nd	nd
Ukraine	67	46.7
Uzbekistan	20.9	5.1

Latin America and the Caribbean

HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is estimated to be 43.7% in Latin America and 43.6% in the Caribbean. HBV prevalence among people who inject drugs is estimated to be 2.6% in Latin America; data is insufficient to calculate HBV prevalence in the Caribbean. Country-level HCV prevalence in the Caribbean is only available for Puerto Rico (58.7%).⁸⁹ In Latin America, Mexico is estimated to have the highest HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs not only in the region but in the world, at 71.6%.⁹⁰

A recent systematic review in the region revealed significant gaps in data. HCV testing data is only available from Costa Rica, where 73% of people who inject drugs have ever tested for HCV.⁹¹

Although HBV and HCV treatment is free in Brazil, the number of people receiving direct-acting antiviral (DAA) treatment decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic (from 48,304 in 2019 to 19,496 in 2020). This has led to a fall in HCV diagnoses and referrals, endangering Brazil's plan to eliminate HCV by 2030.^{92,93}

A recent study on the HCV care cascade among people who inject drugs in Puerto Rico revealed substantial barriers that are hindering access to testing and treatment, despite HCV treatment being available and free.^{94,95} Common barriers reported among people who inject drugs include having a limited awareness of testing and treatment services, access issues such as a lack of transport to facilities, abstinence requirements to receive treatment, and stigma and discrimination (e.g., feeling unwelcome at medical facilities, fear of revealing HCV status).⁹⁶

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Antigua and Barbuda	nd	nd
Argentina	nd	nd
Bahamas	nd	nd
Barbados	nd	nd
Belize	nd	nd
Bolivia	nd	nd
Brazil	48.6	nd
Chile	nd	nd
Colombia	30.5	nd
Costa Rica	nd	nd
Cuba	nd	nd
Dominica	nd	nd
Dominican Republic	nd	nd
Ecuador	nd	nd
El Salvador	nd	nd
Grenada	nd	nd
Guatemala	nd	nd
Guyana	nd	nd
Haiti	nd	nd
Honduras	nd	nd
Jamaica	nd	nd
Mexico	nd	nd
Nicaragua	nd	nd
Panama	nd	nd
Paraguay	nd	nd
Peru	nd	nd
Puerto Rico	78.4	nd
Saint Kitts and Nevis	nd	nd
Saint Lucia	nd	nd
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	nd	nd
Suriname	nd	nd
Trinidad and Tobago	nd	nd
Uruguay	nd	nd
Venezuela	nd	nd

Middle East and North Africa

HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is estimated to be 30.5% and HBV prevalence is estimated at 7.5%.^{97,98} HCV prevalence has decreased in the region since 2017 when it was 36.1%, which may be due to Egypt's elimination efforts.⁹⁹

Similar to the situation in West and Central and Eastern and Southern Africa, the region has a significant data gap. Data on the proportion of people who inject drugs who have ever tested for HCV is only available in Morocco, where 52.1% have ever been tested.¹⁰⁰ The proportion of people who inject drugs in the region who have ever received HCV treatment is estimated to be 26.4%, but this is based on data from only two countries (Morocco and Türkiye).¹⁰¹

Egypt shows what can be achieved in a lower-middle-income country when a large-scale screening and treatment programme is implemented. Here, it is estimated that 96% of people living with HCV are diagnosed.¹⁰²

However, criminalisation of drug use and insufficient access to harm reduction services like NSP still act as major barriers to reducing the burden of viral hepatitis in Egypt.¹⁰³

HCV incidence is rising in Pakistan, which is home to 10% of people living with HCV.¹⁰⁴ It is estimated that a third of new HCV infections globally occur in the country.¹⁰⁵ The Pakistani government provides free hepatitis testing and treatment for people who use drugs and for those who cannot afford to pay for these services. Home delivery of medication is also available to ensure access to treatment.¹⁰⁶

Nai Zindagi is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which provides community-based services across 63 districts in Pakistan, serving 6,500-7,000 people who inject drugs daily.¹⁰⁷ In July 2023, the NGO began offering HCV screening and referrals through its established HIV services. This means Nai Zindagi is now able to offer HCV screening in all districts and HCV treatment services in 11 high-prevalence districts.¹⁰⁸ Nai Zindagi is now working on scaling up these services. Increasing services for marginalised populations is vital for the country, and people who inject drugs are highlighted as an especially important key population in HCV elimination progress reports.^{109,110}

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Afghanistan	23.08	2.77
Algeria	nd	nd
Bahrain	3.89	nd
Djibouti	nd	nd
Egypt	nd	nd
Iraq	nd	nd
Iran	36.8	3.04
Israel	nd	nd
Jordan	nd	nd
Kuwait	30.87	1.52
Lebanon	23.59	1.07
Libya	94.2	4.5
Morocco	63.13	nd
Oman	36.56	6.29
Pakistan	51.32	2.66
Palestine	41.48	6.15
Qatar	nd	nd
Saudi Arabia	62.61	7.7
Somalia	nd	nd
Sudan	nd	nd
Syria	3.3	0.5
Tunisia	28.32	4.3
United Arab Emirates	nd	nd
Yemen	nd	nd

North America

In Canada, estimated HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is 20.6%, and HBV prevalence is 0%. In the USA, HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is 43.7% and HBV prevalence is 4.8%. As the USA has the highest rate of injecting drug use in the world (1.5% of the general population or 3.1 million people), the country has the highest number of people who inject drugs living with HCV globally.^{111,112} While HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs decreased in the region since the 2017 estimate (from 9% to 5.9%), HCV prevalence has increased, mostly due to increased opioid use in the USA.

HCV testing and treatment among people who inject drugs has been estimated based on combined data from Canada and the USA. Across the region, 77.2% of people who inject drugs are estimated to have ever tested for HCV, and 31.1% of those living with HCV have received treatment.

In the USA, acute HCV infection increased by 97% between 2015 and 2020, largely driven by increased opioid use.^{113,114} The current administration has put forward a five-year programme to put the country on course to eliminate HCV. The proposal focuses on on-site quick tests, affordable treatment and comprehensive public health outreach. There are examples of HCV services integrated into harm reduction services. For example, all NSPs in Florida offer rapid HIV and HCV testing and treatment navigation, and there are NSPs and OAT clinics offering HCV treatment.^{115,116} Serious barriers to treatment access persist. There are reports of people who use drugs, especially people who inject drugs, being denied HCV treatment. Typical restrictions on access to HCV treatment are abstinence requirements and concerns about reinfections.¹¹⁷ Greater focus on reaching people who inject drugs and increasing access to harm reduction services is vital to reach WHO elimination targets.¹¹⁸

In the USA, national recommendations for HBV screening and testing were recently updated and now explicitly include injecting drug use as a risk factor. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends HBV screening for all adults once in their lifetime and HBV vaccination for all adults aged 19-59 years. The recommendation also states that testing should be provided regardless of whether people disclose their risk level due to the understanding that many people might be reluctant to disclose risks that are stigmatised.¹¹⁹

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Canada	64.2	nd
United States of America	53.5	4.8

Oceania

There are no recent estimates on HCV prevalence for Pacific Island countries and states. In the rest of the region, HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is estimated to be 24.4% (17.8% in Australia, 53% in Aotearoa New Zealand), which is a considerable reduction since 2017, when it was 42.8%.^{120,121} HBV prevalence is available for both parts of the region. It is estimated to be 8.5% among people who inject drugs in Pacific Island countries, 2.2% in Australia and 2.8% in Aotearoa New Zealand.¹²²

Data on testing and treatment among people who inject drugs is not available in Pacific Island countries and states. However, the region has the highest HCV testing rate among people who inject drugs in the world at 86.3% (87.8% in Australia and 79.4% in Aotearoa New Zealand). Data on treatment among people who inject drugs living with HCV is only available in Australia, where 66.9% have received treatment. This is one of the highest rates in the world, second only to Spain.¹²³

In Australia, the Surveillance and Treatment of Prisoners with hepatitis C (SToP-C) study implemented HCV treatment-as-prevention in four prisons in New South Wales.^f Altogether, 3,691 people were enrolled in the programme and were at high risk regarding HCV infection: among those reporting recent injecting, 91% reported sharing injecting equipment while in prison.¹²⁴ The study demonstrates the effectiveness of HCV treatment-as-prevention in prisons and other closed settings as HCV incidence significantly reduced after DAA therapy was scaled up. The greatest reduction in HCV infections was among people who inject drugs, where HCV incidence more than

halved (from 39 per 100 person-years to 14 per 100 person-years).^{g,125} These findings provide important evidence to support increased HCV treatment access and coverage, including unrestricted access to DAA treatment, to improve elimination efforts in prisons and other closed settings and in the broader community.^{126,127}

Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Aotearoa New Zealand	53	2.8
Australia	32	2.2
Federated States of Micronesia	nd	nd
Fiji	nd	nd
Kiribati	nd	nd
Marshall Islands	nd	nd
Nauru	nd	nd
Palau	nd	nd
Papua New Guinea	nd	nd
Samoa	nd	nd
Solomon Islands	nd	nd
Timor Leste	nd	nd
Tonga	nd	nd
Tuvalu	nd	nd
Vanuatu	nd	nd

^f Treatment-as-prevention is a method where treatment is used as a tool for limiting the spread of an infection.

^g A person-year is a unit calculated by multiplying the number of people in a study by the time each person spends in the study.

Western Europe

In Western Europe, HCV prevalence among people who inject drugs is estimated to be 38.2% and has remained steady since 2017 (39.9%). HBV prevalence is estimated to be 2.7% (3.2% in 2017).¹²⁹ Greece has the highest HCV prevalence in the region (67.2%), while Italy has the highest number of people who inject drugs living with HCV (a 39.6% HCV prevalence rate among 320,500 people who inject drugs).¹³⁰

In Europe, the latest estimate suggests 81.6% of people who inject drugs have ever tested for HCV. Out of the 15 countries with available HCV testing data, only 4 countries had a testing level below 70% (62.5% in Belgium, 66.2% in Ireland, 43.9% in Montenegro and 53.3% in Switzerland). Despite the high coverage of HCV testing in the region, only a quarter (25.6%) of people who inject drugs living with HCV received treatment.¹³¹

In Ireland, free HCV self-testing kits have been available since 2023. More than 5,500 home tests have been ordered since the start of the programme, indicating the feasibility of this new decentralized approach to HCV testing. The test requires someone to carry out a finger prick blood test, and then post the sample in a pre-paid envelope to a lab for analysis.¹³² Although self-testing is a convenient solution for some, it may not be appropriate for others, such as people experiencing homelessness. In-person integrated testing services can deliver counselling, treatment referrals and accompaniment to other health services. These additional services can be crucial for people who inject drugs to decrease the barriers they face to accessing treatment, particularly those linked to stigma and discrimination and negative past experiences.

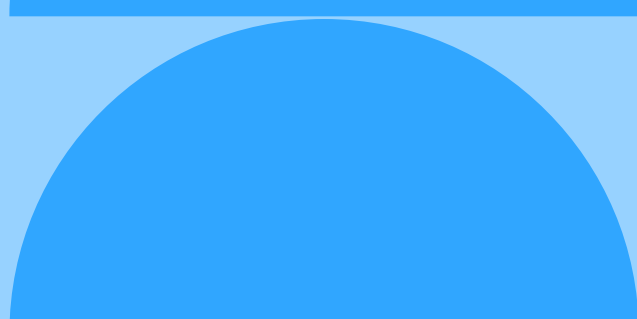
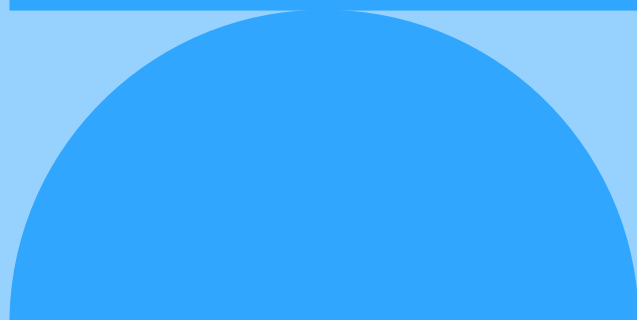
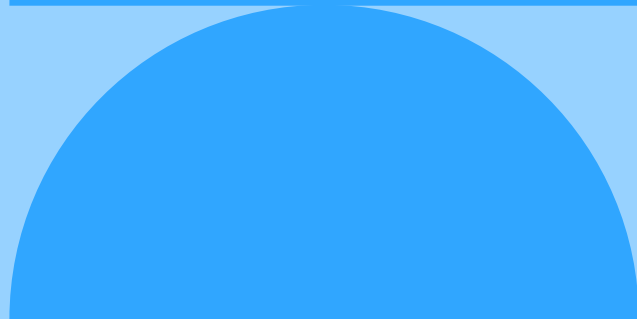
Country	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)
Andorra	nd	nd
Austria	16.7	4.4
Belgium	48.8	2
Cyprus	42.4	4.7
Denmark	65.6	1.3
Finland	73.7	nd
France	41.7	0.8
Germany	62.9	0.9
Greece	53.7- 69.6	2.1
Iceland	10	nd
Ireland	77.2	nd
Italy	63.8	nd
Liechtenstein	nd	nd
Luxembourg	71.1	nd
Malta	43.8	0
Monaco	nd	nd
Netherlands	61	0
Norway	38.8	1.5
Portugal	71.9	5.7
San Marino	nd	nd
Spain	45.9	5.3
Sweden	65.2	1.5
Switzerland	74.6	nd
Türkiye	37.5	3.9
United Kingdom	57	5.9

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THEMATIC CHAPTER: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



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INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

In response to the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* thematic survey, 95% of Indigenous respondents indicated that drug use had been identified as a problem among Indigenous people in their countries. Methamphetamine, cannabis, tobacco and opioids were identified as the most commonly used drugs. The majority of respondents (77%) said drug-related harm was higher for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous people.¹

A 2017 evidence review by Anton Clifford-Motopi (Mosotho)^a and Anthony Shakeshaft confirmed Indigenous people in Canada, the USA, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand experience disproportionately high burdens of harm from substance use.² Among Indigenous contexts considered in this chapter, opioid toxicity deaths were seven times higher for Kainai people in Alberta, Canada than for the general population,³ while in Minnesota, USA, opioid toxicity deaths were six times higher for Native Americans than for non-Hispanic whites.⁴

a Throughout this chapter, where source contributors are Indigenous people, the name of their community is given.

Note on our use of the term 'Indigenous'

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples purposefully does not include a formal definition of Indigenous peoples, noting that self-identification as Indigenous is considered a fundamental criterion of indigeneity, and that Indigenous peoples hold the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions.⁵

The United Nations does, however, describe the following experiences and characteristics as commonly shared among Indigenous peoples: "Indigenous peoples have in common a historical continuity with a given region prior to colonization and a strong link to their lands. They maintain, at least in part, distinct social, economic and political systems. They have distinct languages, cultures, beliefs and knowledge systems. They are determined to maintain and develop their identity and distinct institutions and they form a non-dominant sector of society."⁶

Most survey respondents identified trauma from colonisation as a primary catalyst for drug-related harms experienced by Indigenous people.⁷ This trauma is exacerbated by ongoing structural racism,

Increasingly, Indigenous harm reduction is turning away from mainstream Western frameworks towards self-determined approaches imbued with Indigenous identity, values and knowledge.

defined by Keith Lawrence and Terry Keleher as ‘an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color’.⁸ Structural racism might be manifested in ease of access to alcohol and drugs,⁹ overprescription of opiate medications,¹⁰ underfunding of Indigenous healthcare,¹¹ lack of recognition for Indigenous healthcare models (including at the level of multilateral organisations such as the World Health Organization),¹² policies that are unfavourable to the complexity, scale and urgency of drug-related harms experienced by Indigenous people,¹³ intersectional stigma and discrimination (including in healthcare settings) and over-policing.

Intergenerational poverty directly relates to colonisation and structural racism, and it is another significant catalyst for drug use among Indigenous people. Poverty is compounded by unemployment, a lack of social services such as housing and limited access to ancestral land for traditional economic activities.¹⁴ Josien Tokoe (Kari’na) describes the situation in Suriname as follows: ‘Some communities are surrounded by third-party concessions, which prohibit them from entering the forest to hunt or fish for their daily family support. Young people and many [marginalised people] are on drugs, alcohol, etc., which means there are no development prospects for the future.’¹⁵

These responses vary in scale and relative complexity. The case studies presented below are selected to convey the range of harm reduction responses deployed within Indigenous settings, from urgent intervention via extrajudicial use of naloxone to longer term healing through the reintegration of Indigenous worldviews, languages and ways of life.

Work is currently being undertaken by Indigenous people around the world, including the Aboriginal Drug & Alcohol Council (South Australia), Drug Free World Fiji, Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas (Paraguay), First Nations Health Authority (Canada), Indigenous Health Australia, Papa Ola Lokahi (Hawai’i), Te Hiku Hauora (Aotearoa New Zealand), Thunderbird Partnership Foundation (Canada) and many others.^b

^b For more on these organisations see: Aboriginal Drug & Alcohol Council: <https://adac.org.au>; Federación por la Autodeterminación de los Pueblos Indígenas: <https://fapi.org.py>; Indigenous Health Australia: <https://iaha.com.au>; Papa Ola Lokahi: www.papaolalokahi.org; Te Hiku Hauora: www.tehikuhauora.nz; Thunderbird Partnership Foundation: <https://thunderbirdpf.org/>.

ALBERTA, CANADA

Esther Tailfeathers (Kainai Nation), Medical Lead of the Indigenous Wellness Core at Alberta Health Services, has led the Kainai response to the fentanyl crisis, initiating a harm reduction response that is underpinned by 'kímmapiiyipitssini', a Blackfoot term meaning 'to give kindness to each other'.¹⁶

Tailfeathers identifies several social determinants that made the Kainai Nation vulnerable to fentanyl, including intergenerational poverty, unemployment and inadequate housing. The historic trauma of the Canadian Indian residential schooling system, and the adverse childhood events associated with it, is the number one cause.^c

A more recent factor has been overprescription of opioids to First Nations people. Data from the Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre shows opiates being prescribed to Indigenous people at twice the rate of non-Indigenous people.¹⁷

Tailfeathers' work follows a 'continuum of care' model, which moves from prevention to harm reduction, clinics, detoxification, treatment and aftercare to supportive housing, community care and, finally, to addressing the social determinants of challenges around drug use. A major part of her work to date has involved bringing naloxone kits onto the Kainai reserve and educating people about their use.

This work was initially outside the law, as naloxone could only be provided in metropolitan clinical settings. However, Dr Hakiq Virani, a substance use specialist in Alberta, provided the programme with 50 naloxone kits. Dr Virani was subsequently fired by the federal government for providing naloxone to the community. However, the intervention proved so effective, the Kainai Chief successfully petitioned the federal government to

reinstate Dr Virani, and naloxone was made more widely available in First Nations community settings across the country.

A further challenge for Tailfeathers' work was resistance from Kainai elders, who thought naloxone would enable drug use on the reserve. Tailfeathers' team provided information to community members which enabled them to see that the use of naloxone was about celebrating the lives of people without judgment. As Tailfeathers bluntly states in a speech given in 2023: "our [position] was you cannot enable a dead body to continue to use drugs".¹⁸ The last two fentanyl overdose deaths on the Blood Reserve occurred on 20 March 2015, directly contrasting to the steady increase in overdose deaths across Alberta following the provincial government's cutbacks to harm reduction services.^d

Carol Hopkins (Lenape Nation), CEO of Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, notes that First Nations harm reduction remains uneven: 'There are some programs, like national distribution of naloxone [and] some communities have access to resources that support mobile outreach and distribution of sterile drug use equipment. But this is not standard across all First Nations because of inequitable funding'.¹⁹

MINNESOTA, USA

Minnesotan Native American communities have similarly had to pursue their own responses to the opioid overdose epidemic into a headwind of federal underfunding and inadequate policy. Thaius Boyd (Ohkay Owingeh and San Felipe Pueblo) et al. note this has happened despite the USA government's obligation, rooted in Native American treaties, to provide healthcare services to Native Americans in exchange for land and resources.²⁰

c From the 1880s until 1996, Indigenous children (some as young as four) were compulsorily removed from their homes and placed in residential schools, where many experienced physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

d Tailfeathers cites Alberta First Nations Information Governance Centre data which shows the rate of apparent accidental opioid poisoning deaths among Alberta First Nations people rising from 44.1 per 100,000 people in 2016 to 142.8 per 100,000 people in 2020.

Government attempts to improve Native American access to health services and Native American health outcomes have been negatively affected by consistent underfunding. In 2019, for example, the Indian Health Service per capita expenditure for healthcare services was USD 4,078, compared with a national average of USD 9,726 per person.²¹

These federal policy failures have been exacerbated by opioid prescribing and dispensing practices which include a lack of oversight of opioid prescription within the Indian Health Service.²²

Opioid agonist therapy (OAT) is a critical public health tool for addressing increase in opioid use and related harms, including overdoses.²³ But the lack of culturally appropriate options, which explicitly integrate spirituality, holistic healing and wellness care into OAT, may exacerbate and prolong opioid-related harm within Native American communities. In 2017, only 22% of substance use treatment facilities offered OAT for Native Americans and Alaskan Natives, rising to only 40% in 2018.²⁴

This low uptake of OAT among Native Americans is also due to an absence of specialised expertise and training, stigma towards substance use and treatment and misperceptions about treatment therapy.²⁵ This echoes Tailfeathers' observation about the cool reception to naloxone from Kainai elders.

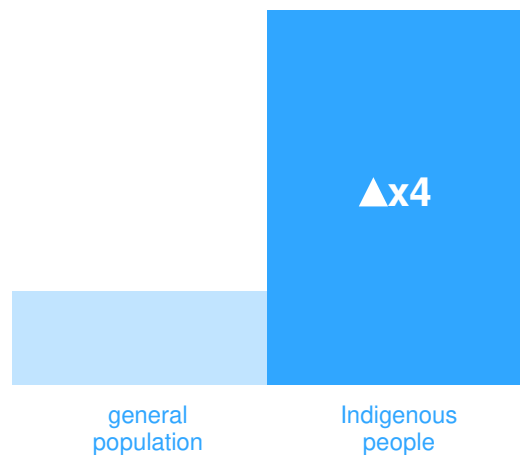
OAT with culturally-specific implementation approaches, integrated care, a focus on family and community wellness and accompanying psychosocial counselling would facilitate greater acceptance among Native Americans and better treatment outcomes.²⁶

WISCONSIN, USA

While uptake of OAT has been uneven in Native American tribes and settings in the USA, there have been notable successes, including among the Bad River band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Wisconsin.

The 2022 rate of overdose deaths among Indigenous people in Wisconsin was four times that of the general population (97.8 per 100,000 people, against a statewide average of 24.8).²⁷ To counter this, and to avoid the potential stigma posed by in-clinic treatment, the Bad River band established a statewide mail-order service offering free naloxone in late 2022. Since then, the tribe, in partnership with the NEXT Distro online and mail-based harm reduction service,²⁸ has made 1,900 deliveries to people in at least 63 counties. Tribe members have also provided more than 2,000 in-person deliveries. Overall, around 14,800 doses of naloxone and 165,000 syringes have been distributed.²⁹

Overdose deaths in Wisconsin



SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

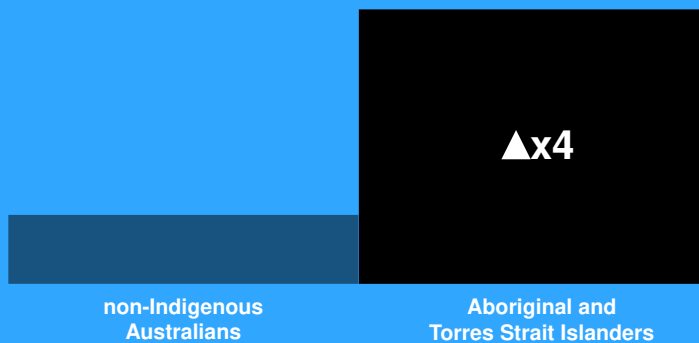
The Pennington Institute's *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2023* states there were 1,675 unintentional drug-induced deaths in Australia in 2021.³⁰ The report notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had a higher rate of unintentional drug-induced deaths (20 per 100,000 people) than non-Indigenous Australians (5.9 per 100,000 people).^{e,31} While this number is significantly lower than the rates identified for Alberta First Nations people (142.8 per 100,000 people in 2020 – see footnote c) and Wisconsin Native Americans (97.8 per 100,000 people in 2022, as above), the disproportionality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is alarming.^f

In 2023, Marguerite Tracy and Bradley Freeman

(Bundjalung) et al. reviewed treatments for drug harm among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.³² Cannabis is identified as the most common recently-used drug reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (16%), followed by strong pain relievers (not purchased over the counter) and opioids (5.9%).³³ The authors note the central, ongoing role of colonisation in placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders at increased risk of harms from drug use.³⁴ They endorse tailored holistic treatments which combine mainstream clinical practice with culturally secure care that promotes social and emotional wellbeing. This is a dual approach that is common among Australia's 140 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services.³⁵

- e The Pennington Institute's *Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2023*, p.45 clarifies that data on Indigenous status is only reported for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory (i.e., Victoria, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania are absent) as these are the only states with an appropriate level of Indigenous identification and sufficient number of Indigenous deaths for the Australian Bureau of Statistics to include the data in its causes of death analysis
- f Scott Wilson, board member of the Pennington Institute and director of the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (South Australia), believes that the difference between the Indigenous Australian and Indigenous North American rates of unintentional drug-induced deaths is due to fentanyl not having taken as strong a hold in Australia as it has in North America.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are four times more likely to die of an unintentional drug overdose as compared to non-Indigenous Australians



The Aboriginal Medical Service Cooperative (AMS) is a longstanding example of an Indigenous community-controlled health service. It was established in Redfern, a suburb of Sydney, in 1971 to counter the racism Aboriginal people experienced in mainstream health services and provide comprehensive and culturally secure primary healthcare for local Aboriginal people.³⁶

The AMS founded a Drug and Alcohol Unit in 1999, following record numbers of people dying from heroin overdoses in Sydney and New South Wales.³⁷ The unit combines mainstream relapse prevention approaches with culturally-centred care led by Indigenous staff. Cultural aspects of care include connection to country through yarning, incorporation of family and observance of local cultural protocols.³⁸ The unit's coordinator (a Bundalung man) provides onsite counselling, aided by an Aboriginal drug and alcohol worker (of any gender, as required).³⁹

The unit's mainstream medical care follows standard practice. When first established, the unit provided methadone prescribing and counselling. From 2001, it started prescribing and dispensing buprenorphine tablets. Later on, it began providing a branded medication called Suboxone (buprenorphine plus naloxone). At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the unit offered slow-release injectable buprenorphine (Buvidal), meaning clients would not need daily or near-daily visits to the unit. The unit currently prescribes for around 150 clients, including onsite dispensing of Suboxone or Buvidal.⁴⁰ The unit's doctors also provide home detoxes, relapse prevention medicines and treatment for hepatitis C.⁴¹

TEAROA (AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND)

Andre McLachlan (Ngāti Apa /Ngāti Kauae, Muaūpoko/Ngāti Pāiri) and Waikareomoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga, Ngāti Māhanga) describe similar combined approaches within Aotearoa New Zealand, where Western clinical practices have been reframed within an Indigenous understanding of harm reduction.⁴²

McLachlan and Waitoki note that Māori, as with other Indigenous people, are disproportionately affected by mental health and challenges with substance use.⁴³ The authors see a tendency within Western approaches to drug-related harm to use reductionist models that focus on the individual outside of their relationship with family or community. Such top-down approaches utilise principles held by the practitioner and their organisation, rather than by the individual or their collective, and lack consideration of the needs, preferences and voices of those affected and their communities. This can lead to unintended consequences like criminalisation, inequitable law enforcement experiences, withdrawal-related harms and disconnection from treatment agencies and support services.⁴⁴

Strategies focussed upon isolated health behaviours have limited efficacy if they do not also address the impact of systemic issues related to colonisation, interpersonal and structural racism, intergenerational trauma, poverty, homelessness or other determinants of ill health.⁴⁵

Harm reduction responses developed by and from Indigenous perspectives can identify and articulate how colonisation and racism have created the systemic, biological and interpersonal factors leading to challenges with substance use. Extending beyond narrow clinical interventions, Indigenous responses to trauma can focus on cultural revitalisation and regeneration, providing space for language and the cultural dimensions of wellbeing to be centred.⁴⁶

Indigenous harm reduction strategies have been successfully employed within Aotearoa New Zealand healthcare, including *Te Whare Tapa Whā* and *Pae Tata Pae Tawhiti: An Indigenous Framework for Brief and Early Intervention*.^{47,48} The New Zealand Ministry of Health has funded and developed training based on these Indigenous strategies for Māori and non-Māori practitioners working within primary mental healthcare and harm reduction.⁴⁹

There are four components viewed as critical for effective Indigenous harm reduction approaches:

1 Whakapapa: Harm reduction must consider the history and relationships between culture and community-specific harms, particularly colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

2 Huanui oranga: The strengths, preferences and strategies of Indigenous communities must be included to accurately and effectively respond to drug-related harms.

3 Mauri ora, Whānau ora and Wai ora: Harm reduction efforts must seek to increase quality of life as defined by Indigenous communities.

4 Ngā take pū o te tangata: Harm reduction must be guided by the values and principles of Indigenous peoples.⁵⁰

Te Kāika (the village) in Otago, Aotearoa New Zealand is an example of this harm reduction approach.⁹ Te Kāika was founded by Ōtākou Health Limited, a Ngāi Tahu^h charity, with the vision of providing integrated health, social and educational services to Māori and other guests. Te Kāika prioritises affordability and takes a holistic, Māori-centred approach to improving and maintaining whānau (family) wellbeing; this reduces cultural and financial barriers to accessing health services.

Its services include the Te Kāika Community-Based Alcohol and Other Drug Addictions Service, which provides inclusive harm reduction within Māori-centred models of relational care for people with moderate to severe drug challenges and their families. The service incorporates a range of approaches, including safer use, managed use and abstinence, meeting people who use drugs ‘where they’re at’, and addressing the conditions of substance use along with the use itself.

Te Kāika’s operations parallel the dual approach recommended by the AMS unit in Redfern, Sydney and other Indigenous settings in Australia. Its clinical practice (delivered by Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners) is underpinned by the Te Whare Tapa Whā framework (outlined in the left hand column) and uses Indigenous delivery models, such as Ngāi Tahu’s *Whānau as First Navigators*,⁵¹ which champions the roles of family self-agency and received ancestral wisdom in achieving and maintaining wellbeing.

Despite the recent positive developments in reducing drug-related harm among Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, a change of government in 2023 has seen nuanced Māori health policy abandoned in favour of a one-size-fits-all approach. This may stall some of the momentum that was building within Māori harm reduction. A respondent to the *Global State of Harm Reduction* survey observes: ‘[The] NZ government very recently dismantled the Māori health support organisation [authority], choosing instead to reduce its impact by cutting jobs and pushing it back into the mainstream health system, which instantly reduces services, increases waiting times and by design, de-prioritises Māori health.’⁵² This policy shift, with its expected reduction in services, mirrors changes described by Tailfeathers and Boyd within First Nations and Native American contexts (above).

^g For more on this, see www.tekaika.nz.

^h Ngāi Tahu (people of Tahu) is the collective tribal name for a conglomerate of interrelated sub-tribes in Te Waipounamu (the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand).

Increasingly, Indigenous people are taking the lead in their own healthcare relating to drugs, establishing harm reduction interventions and care programmes that are designed and implemented by and for themselves, with some notable successes. As described by Indigenous scholars, optimal Indigenous harm reduction will require approaches that merge leading clinical practice with Indigenous worldviews (identity, values and knowledge) and Indigenous leadership and agency, supported by stable policy and equitable funding. Achieving and maintaining this balance in the current volatile global political environment will require skill, resilience and tireless advocacy.

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THEMATIC CHAPTER: PRISONS

AUTHOR OF PRISONS CHAPTER: Triona Lenihan



Triona Lenihan is a human rights advocate with 12 years of experience, mostly in the justice sector. She holds a BCL (Law) and LLM in International Human Rights Law and Public Policy from University College Cork. Based in London, she previously led Penal Reform International's policy and international advocacy programme, where she supported implementation of human rights standards in prisons. She is currently an international policy adviser on rule of law and human rights at the Law Society of England and Wales.

PRISONS

The term ‘prisons’ is used to describe places of criminal legal detention, where individuals are held either pre-trial or under sentence. It does not include other places of deprivation of liberty where harm reduction services are also needed, including immigration or police detention or mental health institutions.

PLACES OF HIGH NEED AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR HARM REDUCTION

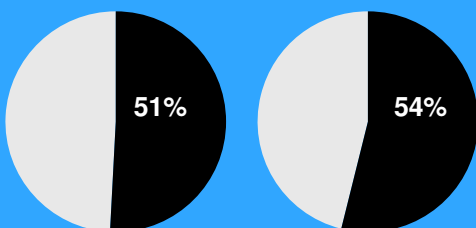
An estimated 11.5 million people were in prison globally in 2022.¹ While at least 66 jurisdictions in 40 countries have in some way decriminalised personal use and possession of drugs,² punitive drug policies remain a key driver of imprisonment worldwide.³

In 2022, 51% of global prosecutions (1.4 million people) and 54% of convictions (900,000 people) for drug-related offences were for drug use or possession.⁴ Punitive drug policies have also led to the overrepresentation of racialised and marginalised groups in the criminal legal system.⁵ Over one in three women in prison globally are incarcerated for drug offences, rising to 60-80% in some Latin American and Asian countries.⁶

The criminalisation of drug use means people who use drugs are over-represented in prisons: an estimated one third to half of all people entering prison have a history of drug use.⁷ The likelihood of injecting drug use decreases with incarceration, however, some people continue or start injecting drugs while in prison.⁸ This is linked to poor prison environments that lack purposeful activity and where drug use is acceptable or even pressurised by peers.⁹ High-risk behaviours, such as sharing syringes, also increase in prisons. In Australia, for example, data from 2022 shows 73% of people entering prison had used drugs in the past year.¹⁰ On release, 37% had used illicit drugs in prison; 14% injected drugs in prison and 13% shared injecting equipment.¹¹

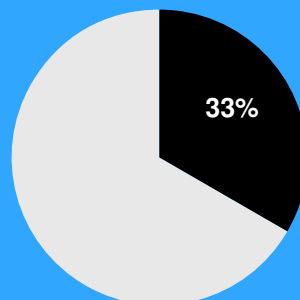
The situation is compounded by the fact that people in prison are likely to have a poorer health status

51% of global prosecutions and 54% of convictions for drug-related offences were for drug use or possession



● people incarcerated for drug use or possession

1/3rd of all women in prison globally are incarcerated for drug offences



● women incarcerated for drug offences
● women in prison

than the general population¹² and unfavourable environmental factors in prison, such as overcrowding and inadequate access to healthcare and harm reduction services. As a result, people in prison have an alarmingly high risk of contracting infectious diseases and experiencing other negative health outcomes compared to the general population. The latest figures from UNAIDS show

the global median of HIV prevalence reported among people in prison in 2023 was almost double that of the general population.¹³

HIV prevalence in prisons is highest in Eastern and Southern Africa (12% regionally), and was estimated to be as high as 21% in Zambia and 35% in Zimbabwe in 2022.¹⁴ Over 15% of people in prisons globally are living with hepatitis C virus (HCV) and 5% have chronic hepatitis B virus.¹⁵ In the USA, HCV is nearly nine times more prevalent in prisons than in the community.¹⁶

The increased risk of negative health outcomes from infectious diseases and unsafe drug use in prisons means that harm reduction interventions are critically needed and can have a significant, positive impact.¹⁷ For some, prisons may provide an opportunity for improved adherence to treatment and increased use of harm reduction services. The UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) require that, when people enter prison, they are assessed for symptoms or risk of drug withdrawal and any treatment that is needed is provided (Rule 30c). Failure to provide such treatment may amount to ill-treatment and is thus prohibited under the Convention Against Torture.¹⁸

As closed settings, prisons provide an opportunity for universal screening and ‘micro-elimination’ of communicable diseases among a high-risk population.

For example, in France, where HCV is 10 times more prevalent in prisons than outside, one remand prison has succeeded in eliminating the virus for the past seven years, attributed to a proactive screening policy. The prison, which has also set up a syringe exchange programme and an exchange for stimulant smoking kits, has had no overdose deaths for 10 years.^{19a} In Virginia, USA, where HCV prevalence is 10 times higher among people in prison than the general population, a pharmacist-led telemedicine HCV clinic achieved a 97% cure rate among 1,040 people in prison with chronic HCV who were treated between 2020 and 2022.²⁰

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION IN PRISONS



International human rights norms and standards, including the Nelson Mandela Rules, state that people in prison are entitled to the same standard of healthcare as people in the community (the principle of equivalence).²¹ This is interpreted to apply to harm reduction services, meaning that services in prison should be as available and accessible, and of the same quality and voluntary nature, as those that exist for the general population. Moreover, experts have questioned whether the aim, instead of equivalence of care, should be equivalence of objectives and results, which would involve a higher standard of care for people in prison.^b

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO)

a This is an unsanctioned NSP operating without formal approval from the government.

b This opinion is supported by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health. See Harm Reduction International, (2016), *HIV, HCV, TB and Harm Reduction*, HRI, London.

include needle and syringe programmes (NSP), opioid agonist therapy (OAT), naloxone distribution and other services in their latest recommended interventions for people in prisons.²² UN human rights bodies have called for harm reduction to protect the right to health in prisons,²³ and 108 countries recognise harm reduction in their national laws or policies.²⁴ Yet, implementation in prisons remains far behind implementation in the community and wholly inadequate, with little improvement since the last *Global State of Harm Reduction* report.

OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY



OAT is available in at least one prison in 60 countries (compared to 93 in the community). This is only one more country than in 2022 when 59 countries offered OAT in prison. OAT is now known to be available in at least one prison in Algeria, Puerto Rico and Türkiye, but we can no longer confirm availability in Bulgaria and Palestine.

Availability of OAT in prisons varies widely between regions. Most countries that provide at least one prison-based OAT programme are in Western Europe (21 countries) and Eurasia (19 countries). In contrast, fewer countries offer OAT in prisons in the Middle East and North Africa (six countries)^c, Asia (five countries)^d, Eastern and Southern Africa (four countries)^e or Oceania (two countries)^f. Puerto Rico offers the only prison-based OAT programme in Latin America and the Caribbean, and there are no known OAT in prisons in West and Central Africa.

In countries where OAT is available in at least one prison, coverage across the prison estate varies significantly. OAT is available in all prisons in Austria, Kosovo and France.²⁵ In Romania, OAT is functional in 15 prison units out of 45.^{26,27} Similarly,

in Mauritius there are four methadone dispensing sites among 11 prison facilities,²⁸ including one at the women's prison.²⁹ Outpatient OAT clinics were initiated in prisons in Punjab in India in 2022 (in 9 out of 24 prisons). However, there have been reports of staffing issues and a lack of testing kits,³⁰ and nationwide data on people who inject drugs in prisons and coverage of OAT is largely unavailable.³¹

NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMMES



An NSP is available in at least one prison in 11 countries (compared to 93 in the community). This is two more than in 2022 when nine countries provided NSP in prison. France⁹, Iran, North Macedonia and Ukraine now provide at least an NSP in at least one prison, but prison-based NSP is no longer available in Armenia.³² Apart from Canada³³ and Iran,³⁴ all identified NSPs in prisons are in Eurasia (Kyrgyzstan,³⁵ Moldova, North Macedonia, Tajikistan, Ukraine³⁶) and Western Europe (Spain,³⁷ Luxembourg,³⁸ Germany,³⁹ Switzerland,⁴⁰ France^{41g}). Ukraine's first prison NSP opened in Odesa prison in 2023, in collaboration with the NGO FREE ZONE. Based on a prison survey that revealed 50% of respondents had used drugs and 40% were interested in participating in an NSP,⁴² a comprehensive service package was developed. This included training for people in prison and prison staff, and technical support for peer consultants who FREE ZONE later employed. By July 2024, 592 people had received around 19,500 services from the NSP, and 13 people in prison became peer workers to support social reintegration once people were released. Following the success of this model, another prison facility in Ukraine has recently proposed a similar programme.⁴³ In contrast, the

c Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Israel, Lebanon and Morocco.

d India, Indonesia, Macau, Malaysia and Vietnam.

e Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles and Tanzania.

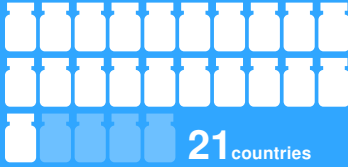
f Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia.

g This is an unsanctioned NSP operating without formal approval from the government.

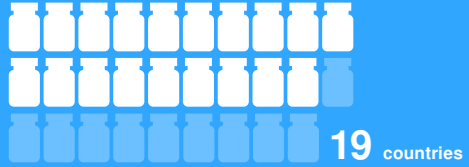
AVAILABILITY OF OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY IN PRISONS BY REGIONS



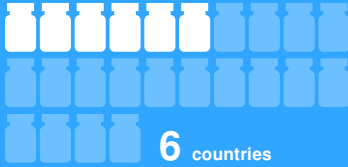
WESTERN EUROPE



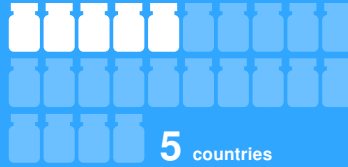
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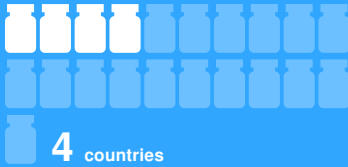
MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



ASIA



EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA



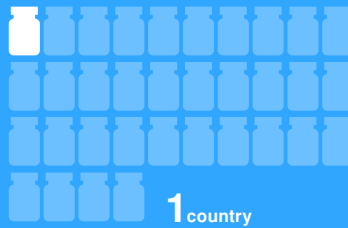
NORTH AMERICA



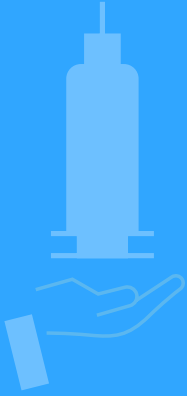
OCEANIA



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WITH NEEDLE AND SYRINGE PROGRAMMES (NSP) IN PRISON



2022



2024
(2 + from 2022,
+ Iran, North Macedonia
and Ukraine, - Armenia)

AN NSP IS AVAILABLE IN AT LEAST ONE PRISON IN 11 COUNTRIES IN 2024

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

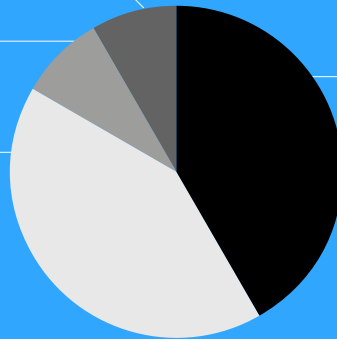
Iran

NORTH AMERICA

Canada

WESTERN EUROPE

Spain
Luxembourg
Germany
Switzerland



EURASIA

Kyrgyzstan
Moldova
North Macedonia
Tajikistan
Ukraine

TAKE-HOME NALOXONE AVAILABLE ON RELEASE IN AT LEAST ONE PRISON



AVAILABLE IN 11 COUNTRIES

France
Germany
Italy
Ireland
Norway
Estonia

Lithuania
Ukraine
Canada
USA
Australia

Austrian government has said it does not envisage implementing NSP in prisons, stating that the country's prisons' substitution programme offers numerous ways to stabilise substance use in line with external OAT guidelines.⁴⁴

NALOXONE



Take-home naloxone is available on release in at least one prison in 11 countries, mostly in Europe (France,⁴⁵ Germany,⁴⁶ Italy,⁴⁷ Ireland,⁴⁸ Norway,⁴⁹ Estonia,⁵⁰ Lithuania,⁵¹ Ukraine⁵²) and North America (Canada⁵³ and the USA⁵⁴), plus one scheme in Oceania (Australia⁵⁵). However, the level of coverage varies significantly. Naloxone-on-release is only available in 3 out of 190 prisons in Italy, for example.⁵⁶ It is available in most prisons in British Columbia, Canada⁵⁷ and Victoria, Australia,⁵⁸ but in both countries it varies by state. In some places, such as France, it requires a prescription,⁵⁹ and in others it is delivered through civil society partnerships. In Ireland, for example, the Irish Red Cross provides peer-to-peer programmes on overdose prevention and naloxone training to equip people with knowledge of and access to naloxone on release from prison.⁶⁰

Within prisons, naloxone tends to only be administered by staff. This limits its effectiveness, since staff will not always be immediately available in overdose situations, and the time they take to respond could be the difference between life and death.

In the Australian Capital Territory, following discussions with labour unions and training for staff, naloxone has been included in prison officers' first aid kits.⁶¹ In Ireland, it can only be administered in an emergency by a nurse, and in Canada, it is only accessible to prison healthcare or security

staff; people in prison cannot have naloxone kits in their cells in case their cellmate experiences an overdose.⁶² Evidence relating to this staff-only approach points to its failings. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found that, despite at least 70 people dying from a drug overdose in federal prisons between 2014 to 2021, staff were hesitant to administer naloxone in a timely manner; medical staff told the OIG that guards trained to use naloxone were "uncomfortable" doing so.⁶³

DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS



Canada opened its first prison-based overdose prevention site (OPS), referred to elsewhere as a drug consumption room (DCR), in Drumheller Institution in Alberta in 2019. Here, people in prison can access sterile syringes, consume drugs in private rooms, and medical staff (not correctional officers) are on hand in case of overdose. Following criticism for delays, two more OPSs opened in 2023 at the Springhill Institution in Nova Scotia and Collins Bay Institution in Ontario. The Drumheller OPS received its first visit from a client after three weeks of opening, but it has now logged nearly 2,000 visits. The first visit from a client to the Springhill OPS took three months.⁶⁴ The experience in Canada shows there is a period after an OPS opens when awareness must be raised and trust must be built among people in the prison so they feel confident to use the service. In federal prisons in Canada, 46 people died from suspected drug overdoses and another 728 people nonfatally overdosed between 2011 to 2022.⁶⁵ To date, there have been no overdose deaths at any facility with an OPS since the service has been active.⁶⁶

BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Making a harm reduction service available in a prison does not necessarily make it fully accessible. In some countries, OAT in prisons is

limited to people who were prescribed OAT before incarceration. This is the case in some Eurasian countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Latvia, Montenegro and Serbia.⁶⁷ Similar restrictions apply in Lebanon,⁶⁸ Macao (China)⁶⁹ and Mauritius.⁷⁰ Even when OAT is available to everyone, regardless of whether someone has been on OAT before prison, there can be increased barriers for those who start OAT while incarcerated, such as treatment waitlists and extensive wait times of up to multiple months, leading to withdrawal and other negative health outcomes.⁷¹ In Victoria, Australia some people have reported commencing OAT post-release to ensure continuity of care if reincarcerated.⁷²

Among the countries surveyed for this report,

the most reported barrier that prevents people in prison from accessing harm reduction, apart from a lack of services, is people's fear of punishment for drug use or possession (in 7 of the 10 countries that provided information)^h, followed by the fear of losing other rights or privileges, privacy concerns, restrictive eligibility criteria and stigmatisation or ill-treatment by staff or peers.

RISK OR PERCEIVED RISK OF SANCTIONS OR LOSS OF RIGHTS OR PRIVILEGES

In Romania, once someone enters a drug treatment programme, they are reportedly declared unfit to work while in prison, which means they will lose their income and cannot participate in a meaningful activity.⁷³ The HIV organisation Asociația Română Anti-SIDA has found the lack of demand for NSP is linked to the fact that people who request syringes

are not given a guarantee that they will not face sanctions.⁷⁴ In Indonesia, research has found people participating in OAT programmes in prison were perceived by both prison staff and peers to be engaged in illicit drug use. They were heavily stigmatised; they were seen as lazy, poor, dirty and unproductive people and were presumed to have HIV.⁷⁵ This multi-layered, intersectional stigma affected not only the OAT clients' quality of life and mental health but also their access to parole, and therefore the possibility of early release. Similarly, in England and Scotland, service users have reported that while people who disclose use of heroin on admission to prison are offered help, those who disclose later are met primarily with a punitive response and are often suspected of selling drugs or other activities which violate prison rules. This leads people in prison to fear that disclosing opioid use will damage their prospects of accessing home detention, curfew, release on temporary licence or parole.

In Canada, only 20% of people approved for an NSP were utilising the service (as of June 2022).⁷⁶ Canada's Correctional Investigator has attributed this poor uptake to various factors, including the prison service's zero-tolerance drug strategy, which conflicts with harm reduction principles, and active opposition to harm reduction among frontline prison staff.⁷⁷ Similarly, a study in Western Canada found women in prison perceived NSP as being incompatible with a prison system that continues to criminalise drugs.⁷⁸

LACK OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

In Moldova, uptake of OAT is believed to be limited by confidentiality breaches as well as stigma and a prison subculture that informally regulates access. Those who accept methadone treatment are frequently subject to bullying and isolation, directed by leaders among the prison population.⁷⁹ Despite

^h Romania, Ukraine, Morocco, Moldova, Australia, Canada and Spain.

an NSP being available in most Moldovan prisons (34 sites, across 15 out of 17 prisons), a survey in 2020 found 22% of people who inject drugs in prison shared injecting equipment, suggesting the lack of anonymity in accessing the service due to the conduct of peers and medical staff may be a deterrent.⁸⁰ Perceived negative consequences of disclosing drug dependence reported by people in prison in England and Scotland include being looked down on by prison staff and peers, being considered weak and a target for bullying by other people in prison and increased attention from prison security, including more frequent body and cell searches.⁸¹

SPECIFIC BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN PRISON

Women who go to prison often have complex circumstances. Many have histories of trauma, and they have higher levels of mental health issues and needs, including drug dependence, than men. All these issues are exacerbated in prison.⁸² The UN Rules on the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) require specialised treatment programmes in prisons that are designed for women with substance dependence, 'taking into account prior victimization, the special needs of pregnant women and women with children, as well as their diverse cultural backgrounds' (Rule 15).⁸³ The Bangkok Rules also state that women in prison should receive medical screening on entry and healthcare while incarcerated, including mental healthcare, HIV treatment, care and support, support in relation to suicide and self-harm and preventive healthcare services which are responsive to the specific needs of women.

Yet, harm reduction is particularly limited for women in prison. The prison-based harm reduction services that exist are concentrated in men's facilities.

For example, the only therapeutic community in Moldovan prisons is in a male facility.⁸⁴ The two prisons in Ireland that have consultant-led, 'in-reach' drug dependence services only accommodate men.⁸⁵ The impact of such a gap in services can be fatal. For example, successive coronial inquests in Australia have identified service provision issues in women's prisons as contributing factors in women's deaths.⁸⁶

Where harm reduction services are available in prisons, they are rarely tailored to women's specific needs and, as in the community, women who use drugs face particular stigma and discrimination when accessing services in many countries.⁸⁷

In Eastern and Southern Africa, civil society has documented widespread barriers to accessing HIV testing and treatment in prison for women who use drugs, including humiliating and punitive treatment by prison staff and services only being available in a limited number of facilities.⁸⁸

In Georgia, OAT (for detoxification) is not available in the women's prison. Instead, women in need of OAT are temporarily transferred to a treatment facility in a male prison where they share a psychiatric ward with men.⁸⁹ As a result, uptake is low among women who accounted for only 2 of the 754 people that benefited from prison-based OAT in 2021.⁹⁰ Discriminatory attitudes from staff and feelings of shame that lead some women to hide their drug use or dependency means it is likely that many women in prison do not access the services available in the system and deal with withdrawal on their own.⁹¹

Researchers have noted the dearth of research on OAT for women in Southeast Asian prisons. This fuels the continued invisibility of women in prison and possible systemic failures to safeguard and uphold their rights, in violation of the Bangkok Rules.⁹²

OTHER MARGINALISED PEOPLE IN PRISON

Other groups that face particular barriers accessing harm reduction in prisons are foreign nationals (partly linked to language barriers, which have been reported in Armenia⁹³ and Ireland⁹⁴), LGBTQI+ people, children, Black, Brown, ethnic minority and Indigenous people and people engaged in sex work (reported in Indonesia⁹⁵ and Armenia⁹⁶).

The challenges these marginalised populations face in prisons are often similar to the issues they experience in the community, including services that are not responsive to their needs. In Morocco and Armenia, for example, standard services are generally provided to all individuals without consideration of the specific needs of women, LGBTQI+ people or other groups.⁹⁷ The lack of tailored services can have significant consequences for people's health and life. Research has exposed a much higher rate of opioid overdose deaths among Black people in prison in Ontario, Canada. The risk is even higher for Black women due to multiple layers of marginalisation based on race, gender and incarceration. The researchers found an urgent need for interventions to address factors including sexism and systemic and structural racism, and for culturally appropriate harm reduction and treatment services in custody and post-release. These services should be comprehensive, multisectoral, community-based and developed in partnership with Black communities.⁹⁸

Sex workers who use drugs face barriers accessing services due to the layered stigma surrounding drug use, sex work and sexual orientation, which in many countries are all criminalised to varying degrees. In Indonesia, trans and gender diverse sex workers who use drugs who are incarcerated are failed by existing harm reduction structures. In Bali, this has led the Women and Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN) and YAKEBA to launch Project GAP to identify and address data, service provision and stakeholder accountability gaps for sex workers who use drugs.⁹⁹ As part of the project, focal points for sex workers who use drugs have been trained on harm reduction, and harm reduction providers have been trained on sexual orientation and gender identity rights, sex worker rights and gender responsive services.

In some countries, trans and gender diverse people in prison are held in long periods of lock-up and solitary confinement, often on grounds of protection. This limits their access to all services in prison, including harm reduction. This has been reported in Ireland,¹⁰⁰ Zambia and the USA.¹⁰¹

“ The challenges these marginalised populations face in prisons are often similar to the issues they experience in the community, including services that are not responsive to their needs. The lack of tailored services can have significant consequences for people’s health and life.”

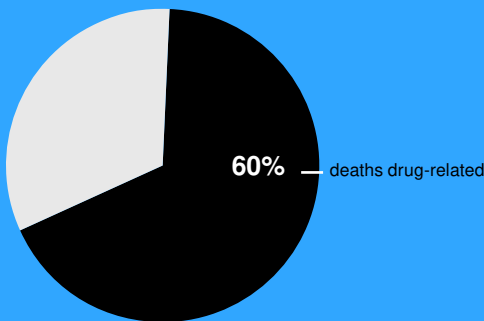
CONTINUITY OF CARE ON RELEASE FROM PRISON

The period following release from prison is one of heightened vulnerability as people experience multiple challenges re-entering society and face higher risks of relapsing to substance use as well as overdose and death.¹⁰² In England and Wales, over 60% of deaths among people in the first two weeks after prison release since 2021 have been drug-related.¹⁰³ The risk of dying from an opioid overdose among men and women who had been in prison in Ontario, Canada between 2015 and 2022 was 28 times and 78 times higher, respectively, than in the general population.¹⁰⁴ The risk of injecting-related infections is higher in the first two weeks after release in Australia, with factors such as poor access to health and harm reduction services, poverty, experience of homelessness and reduced opioid tolerance after incarceration likely to be contributing factors.¹⁰⁵

Receiving OAT while in prison is crucial for reducing deaths among people who use drugs for six months after release (both all-cause deaths and overdose deaths).¹⁰⁶

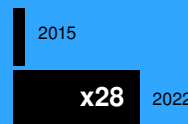
Post-release OAT retention is associated with lower rates of contact with emergency healthcare after release¹⁰⁷ and higher rates of contact with broader primary healthcare.¹⁰⁸ Higher doses of methadone (at least 80 mg per day) before release have been shown to increase the likelihood of retention in post-release OAT. In Malaysia, for example, 46% of people in prison who received a higher methadone dose stayed on OAT after release compared to 28% of those on lower doses.¹⁰⁹ A review of three Southeast Asian countries found family support and reducing societal stigma were key enablers to staying on OAT post-release, while barriers to retention included a lack of trained prison staff and high turnover, poor coordination between prison and community and limited availability of treatment.¹¹⁰ The researchers noted that, despite the growing

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WOMEN



MEN



availability of OAT in the community in the region, the challenge remains to support continuity of care both in and out of prison.

In most of the countries surveyed for this report,ⁱ some form of support is available to people accessing harm reduction in prisons so they can continue accessing services after release and is often provided by civil society organisations (CSOs). However, significant challenges remain. In Victoria, Australia, for example, if people have a significant mental health disorder or are on HCV treatment there are policies for active referral to community-based treatment, but most other healthcare continuity is simply a paper-based health discharge summary provided to people on release to take to their healthcare providers.¹¹¹

In a positive move, Community Transition Teams have been expanded in British Columbia, Canada, from covering 5 correctional centres in the pilot launched in 2019 to province-wide coverage (10 centres), with support extended from 30 to 90 days following release.¹¹² This initiative of BC Mental Health and Substance Use Services (part of the Provincial Health Services Authority) aims to reduce overdose deaths, enhance health outcomes and reduce the harms associated with repeat involvement with the criminal legal system.¹¹³ The teams are made up of social workers, peer support workers, Indigenous patient navigators and nurse prescribers who provide short-term clinical intervention and link clients to mental health and substance use services in the community.¹¹⁴

MANAGEMENT OF HARM REDUCTION IN PRISONS

Prison healthcare should be organised in close relationship with the national health system in a way that ensures continuity of treatment and care, including for HIV, tuberculosis, other infectious

diseases and drug dependence, as required by the Nelson Mandela Rules.¹¹⁵ Both the WHO and the UNODC recommend that the most effective way of doing this is to assign responsibility for prison healthcare to the national health authority, rather than the prison administration.¹¹⁶ In Germany, for example, prison healthcare is under the ministries of justice in the 16 *Länder* (states), and care for people with opioid dependency is fragmented; some *Länder* have almost no waiting list for prison-based OAT and others provide hardly any treatment at all, meaning people on OAT will not be able to continue in prison.¹¹⁷ In Armenia, while the Penitentiary Medical Centre collaborates with healthcare institutions that provide harm reduction, significant issues in continuity of care mean people face interruptions in the services they have initiated both upon entering and leaving prison.¹¹⁸ The failure to transfer responsibility for prison health to the regional health services in Spain is seen as a barrier to the expansion of harm reduction in prisons.¹¹⁹ Countries that have transferred responsibility for prison health to the health ministry include Norway, Finland, Italy, England and Wales and Kazakhstan.¹²⁰ In April 2024, Portugal proposed a gradual transfer, with the aim of ensuring people have uninterrupted access to healthcare during incarceration and upon release by 2030.¹²¹

DELIVERY OF HARM REDUCTION IN PRISONS

In almost all the countries surveyed, harm reduction in prisons is delivered by a range of providers. In Ukraine, for example, healthcare staff with specialised training manage testing, treatment and the coordination of OAT, while counselling, information and educational activities are conducted by social workers or peer volunteers from the prison, and non-governmental organisations are involved with NSP.¹²² Services are most commonly delivered by healthcare staff that are trained for this purpose

ⁱ Respondents of the prisons thematic survey in 11 out of 14 countries indicated that some form of support is available to people accessing harm reduction in prisons to continue access upon release.

(in 10 of the 11 countries where information was available)^j and outside organisations like CSOs (9 countries).^k Prison staff deliver some harm reduction in more than half of the countries,^l often but not always with dedicated training.

Peer programmes exist in 7 out of the 11 countries.^m In Morocco and Ireland, these focus on training peer educators in prisons. The Irish Red Cross (IRC) provides peer programmes on overdose prevention and naloxone training to prepare people for release (in prison, naloxone may only be administered by a nurse in an emergency). IRC peers also run HCV and HIV awareness and anti-stigma campaigns, with voluntary screening.¹²³

QUALITY OF SERVICES IN PRISONS

The quality of information and services provided is often lower in prisons than in the community, resulting in poorer experiences and outcomes for clients. A recent study found 80% of people receiving OAT in Estonian prisons reported not receiving the guidelines or rules at the beginning (compared to 20% in the community), and no one had attended peer-led support groups, suggesting these services are likely not offered in prisons.¹²⁴ About half said there was no designated person within the prison for the services, implying inadequate oversight and support for people undergoing OAT in prisons.¹²⁵

Research has also shown about half of people receiving OAT in prisons in England were pleased with the service they received, while the other half were disappointed, suggesting that good practice is reliant on the culture and commitment of healthcare and prison staff in individual establishments.¹²⁶

Participants emphasised that, in almost every case, a peer or staff member treating them with compassion, as a human being, was key to their engagement and commitment to treatment or recovery.

SCALE UP AND SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICES IN PRISONS

Most harm reduction programmes in prisons, including OAT and NSP, are small with limited coverage and unevenly distributed across prison systems, with many relying heavily on donor funding and support.¹²⁷ National scale up and linkage to national HIV and public health programmes is crucial to ensure equity across prisons and between prisons and the community, while incorporation into state budgets ensures sustainability by protecting services from fluctuations in external funding. In Romania, for example, NSP, OAT and prevention programmes for groups at increased risk of HIV were dramatically reduced once funding from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund) ended, and the government was not able to take over and sustain the financing of services.¹²⁸

In contrast, some prisons in Moldova started offering harm reduction services in 2000 through international funding and technical assistance. Over the years, the country developed a supportive regulatory environment and started funding services from the state budget¹²⁹ and has also expanded services.¹³⁰ Harm reduction programmes in prisons in Mauritius are funded by the government, mainly through the ministry of health and other ministries' budgets, with contribution from the Global Fund for specific items.¹³¹

j Pakistan, Mauritius, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco, Australia, Canada, Ireland and Spain.

k Pakistan, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco, Australia, Canada, Ireland and Spain.

l Mauritius, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco, Australia, Canada and Spain.

m Mauritius, Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco, Australia, Canada and Ireland.

Among the countries surveyed for this report, the biggest barriers to the introduction or expansion of harm reduction in prisons were laws prohibiting drug consumption and sexual relations in prisons, stakeholder support for the ideological principles of abstinence and drug-free prisons, and a lack of support from staff and the general population. In Australia, unions for prison staff are strongly against prison-based NSP and wield considerable power over aspects of prison policies which they believe (despite a lack of evidence) could compromise their health.

In a workshop held by the International Network on Health and Hepatitis in Substance Users – Prisons Network in October 2023, critical barriers preventing the scale up of prison-based hepatitis services were identified as the lack of political will, poor knowledge, attitudes and awareness among prison leadership and staff of viral hepatitis and harm reduction, a lack of education and information on safe injecting practices, stigma around people who use drugs in prison, a lack of sustainable financing and shortages of medical staff.¹³²

Importantly, researchers have noted that while every effort should be made to expand and improve harm reduction services in prisons, for many people in prison with histories of drug use, imprisonment offers little rehabilitative value.

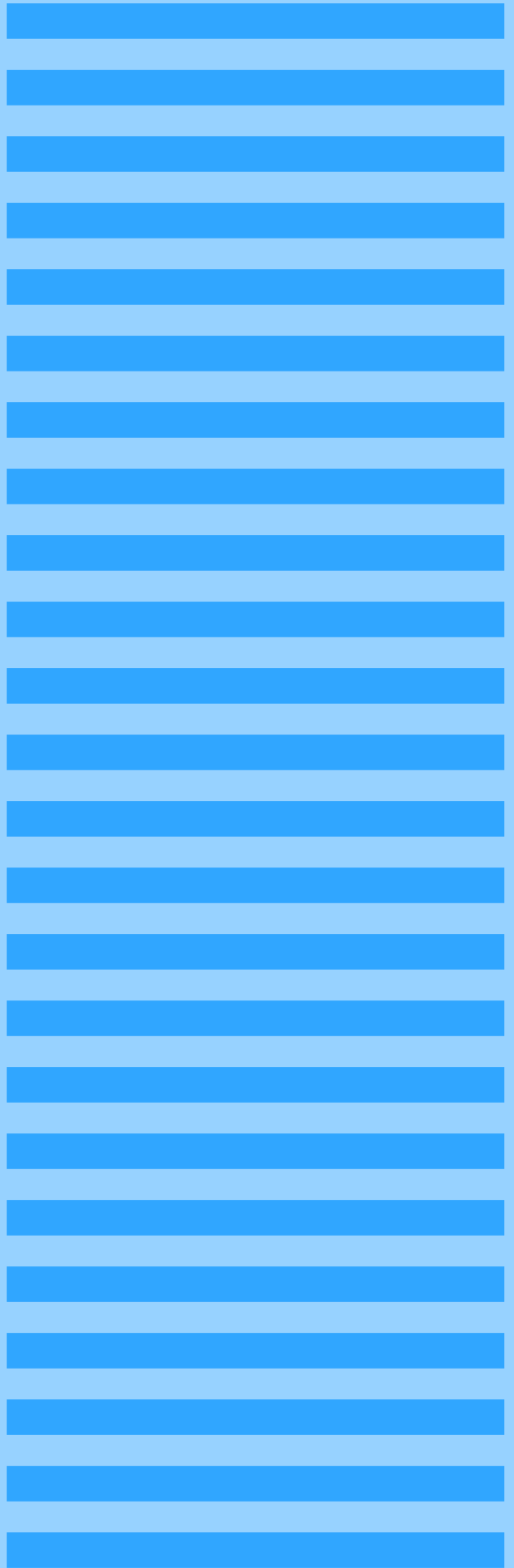
People with drug dependency would be better served by community-based responses which address the root causes of criminal behaviour, are more successful in reducing reoffending, cheaper than imprisonment and do not increase health risks.¹³³ Both the UN System Common Positions on drugs and on incarceration recognise the need to reduce the use of imprisonment, and more UN human rights experts and treaty bodies are urging countries to adopt decriminalisation and alternatives to prison to protect the human rights of people who use drugs.¹³⁴

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THEMATIC CHAPTER: YOUTH



AUTHORS OF YOUTH CHAPTER: Charity Monareng and Ruby Rose Lawlor



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YOUTH

For the first time, the *Global State of Harm Reduction* includes a chapter dedicated to young people and harm reduction. This chapter, based on data from a newly conducted survey, provides valuable insights into the experiences and challenges faced by young people who use drugs, and offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of harm reduction services available to this age group.

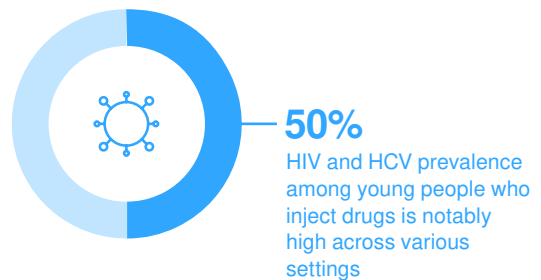
The past two years have seen some recognition that harm reduction services are crucial for protecting the health and human rights of people who use drugs. However, young people who use drugs remain underserved, as most harm reduction services have been designed for adults who use drugs (30 years and older).¹ This has created a gap in addressing the unique needs of adolescents (10-15 years old) and young people (15-24 years old).² Interventions for adolescents and young people continue to focus primarily on prevention and abstinence-based treatment, making harm reduction for this group a controversial subject.³

Young people represent one of the largest demographic groups that uses drugs and have distinct substance use patterns that require specific, evidence-based and tailored harm reduction services.⁴

Young people who inject drugs are 50% more likely to acquire HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) than their adult counterparts.⁵ HIV and HCV prevalence among young people who inject drugs is notably high across various settings.⁶ For example, in North America, young people are disproportionately affected by overdoses⁷ and drug poisonings, and overdose is now the third leading cause of death among this age group.⁸

Adolescents and young people are often subject to different ethical and legal frameworks than older people who use drugs, which dictate the extent to which young people can access harm reduction services. These frameworks are often based on paternalistic paradigms, which prioritise young people's 'protection' against drug use over their autonomy.⁹ This results in restrictive policies that do not fully address the realities of adolescent's and young people's lives and their drug use. The legal status of certain harm reduction interventions varies widely across regions and countries, leading to inconsistencies in the availability and accessibility of these services for adolescents and young people.¹⁰

Young people who inject drugs are 50% more likely to acquire HIV and hepatitis C than their adult counterparts.



“ Young people and adolescents need services that are welcoming and inclusive, free of stigma and discrimination, without age-of-consent policies, which integrate innovative or creative services and provide young people with a safe and comfortable environment where their privacy is respected and protected.”

Youth-friendly harm reduction services: issues and challenges

Despite growing support for harm reduction services such as needle and syringe programmes (NSP), opioid agonist therapy (OAT) and HIV testing for people who use drugs across different populations, many countries provide little or no services specifically for young people who use drugs.¹¹ One of the biggest barriers highlighted by our research is the absence of youth-friendly harm reduction services. Young people and adolescents need services that are welcoming and inclusive, free of stigma and discrimination, without age-of-consent policies, which integrate innovative or creative services and provide young people with a safe and comfortable environment where their privacy is respected and protected. To be effective, youth-friendly

harm reduction services should meaningfully involve young people who use drugs as peers in their activities and decision-making processes.¹² Unfortunately, these kinds of services are lacking in most places.

Other significant barriers that prevent young people from accessing harm reduction services include stigma and discrimination within existing harm reduction services, and young people’s fear of negative repercussions if they come forward, such as getting a criminal record or their career or studies being affected. Another major issue is that young people who use drugs are often unaware of harm reduction services even when they are available.

Barriers to access to harm reduction services: survey responses

	Eastern and Southern Africa	West and Central Africa	Asia	Latin America	North America	Oceania	Western Europe	Eurasia	Middle East & North Africa
ID requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Fear of breaches of privacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Limited opening hours of services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Stigma and discrimination	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Fear of legal repercussions	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Lack of comprehensive youth-friendly services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Age restrictions	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Parent/guardian consent requirement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Fear of academic repercussions	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Limited awareness of services among young people who use drugs	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd
Inaccessible location of services	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	nd	nd

Yes No nd = No Data

Stigma and discrimination

Stigma and discrimination significantly hinder young people's access to harm reduction services. If young people belong to other marginalised groups, for instance if they are female, LGBTQI+, a migrant, a sex worker or neurodiverse, this stigma is compounded, making it difficult for them to seek help without fear of judgement or exclusion.

In Burundi¹³ and Uganda, stigma continues to impede young people's access to harm reduction services, despite the presence of youth-friendly service initiatives, workshops and peer involvement.¹⁴ In South Africa, the absence of youth-specific services worsens stigma, particularly for young women, many of whom end up in rehabilitation facilities where they may face additional discrimination.¹⁵

Similarly, in Nigeria, although youth-friendly harm reduction services exist, stigma and discrimination, especially towards young women and young LGBTQI+ people, along with concerns about privacy and legal repercussions, hinder access.¹⁶ In Canada, stigma within healthcare settings, particularly if young people are female, LGBTQI+ and/or neurodiverse, discourages young people from getting the help and support they need, despite the presence of comprehensive harm reduction services.¹⁷

In Malaysia, government-provided harm reduction services are similarly hindered by stigma and discrimination, particularly against LGBTQI+ people, making it difficult for young people who use drugs to access vital services.¹⁸ Across Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Argentina¹⁹ and Costa Rica, stigma and discrimination against young women, neurodiverse people, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups prevents many young people from accessing harm reduction services, putting their health at risk.²⁰

Legal restrictions and fear of repercussions

Legal environments that impose strict penalties for drug-related offences also stop many young people from engaging in harm reduction services. Fear of legal consequences, parental notification and academic repercussions often deter young people from seeking support.

In Uganda, age restrictions, such as no access to services for people under 18 years old, combined with fears of academic and legal repercussions, significantly hinder young people's ability to access harm reduction services like NSP, OAT and HIV testing. Similarly, in Malaysia, the country's strict legal environment, creates a climate of fear among young people, deterring them from seeking harm reduction services, even when they are available.²¹ In countries such as Austria and the UK, young people face the risk of parental notification and judgmental attitudes when seeking harm reduction services like NSPs and OAT.^{22,23} Concerns about privacy breaches and potential academic consequences further discourage young people from accessing these essential services.²⁴

People with intersecting criminalised identities, such as young sex workers who use drugs, often face multiple, compounded stigma and criminalisation, meaning that these populations are even more cautious and wary of available services due to concerns of legal repercussions.²⁵

‘They threaten to notify parents of use (even when above 18 years), withholding diagnosis and prescriptions due to suspected drug use, being told religious-based drug services are the only option, being told I’m not serious about my health.’

– Survey response from Austria (Students for Sensible Drug Policy International).

Lack of services, lack of awareness

In many regions, harm reduction services are either non-existent or inadequate. Where they do exist, financial constraints and a lack of awareness about what services are available present further barriers for young people. These challenges are often exacerbated in rural areas where service provision is limited and young people may be unaware of their options. This urban-rural divide leaves many young people who use drugs and live in rural areas without access to the necessary support, which makes them more vulnerable to drug-related harms. In several countries a lack of employment and financial opportunities, particularly in rural areas, leaves young people without essential support,²⁶ something that is often exacerbated by a lack of free health services.²⁷

In Liberia, the complete absence of harm reduction services is especially concerning.²⁸ Similarly, in Costa Rica, financial constraints and the absence of dedicated harm reduction services for young people who use drugs in rural areas are particularly pronounced, and this is in a context where awareness and availability of harm reduction services in general are already low.²⁹ Australia also struggles with limited services in rural regions, where financial barriers further restrict access.³⁰ Even in Australian cities, young women, young Indigenous people, young migrants and young LGBTQI+ people face additional barriers arising from treatment-related costs and limited awareness of services.³¹ In Indonesia, the situation is dire. For example, in the city of Bandung only around a quarter of young people who inject drugs access NSP services, and rural areas face even more severe shortages.³² In Mexico, the urban-rural divide means that, while harm reduction services are available in city nighttime venues like bars and clubs, young people in rural regions often go without adequate support.³³ In Aotearoa New Zealand, harm reduction services are concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural regions with minimal access to essential services like NSP, which are primarily available through pharmacies.

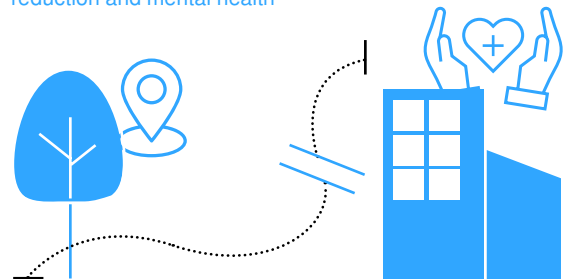
Barriers that are unique to young people

The lack of youth-specific harm reduction services, coupled with the absence of youth-friendly approaches, significantly limits young people's ability to access the care they need. Services that fail to cater specifically to young people's needs often result in low engagement and poor outcomes. In South Africa, the lack of youth-specific harm reduction services means that young people, particularly young women, often end up in facilities not designed to meet their needs, such as general rehabilitation centres. This often leaves young women vulnerable to violence and abuse, not only from partners but also from law enforcement officers who coerce young women to provide sex in order to avoid arrest.

In Ireland, the scarcity of youth-specific services further exacerbates the challenges young people face, while stigma and legal fears hinder young people's access to the limited support on offer. This is especially the case in rural Irish areas where young people who use drugs often struggle to find the support they need.³⁴ When it comes to good practice, a strong example can be seen in Vietnam where Lighthouse Social Enterprise's High Fun initiative works to create youth-friendly environments by involving young peers in the process. However, this is a small-scale project, leaving many young people who use drugs in Vietnam without adequate support.³⁵

The urban-rural divide

Many young people who use drugs and live in rural areas lack access to essential services including harm reduction and mental health



PROVIDING SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS

Expanding health and social services to rural and underserved areas is vital for young people, who are often the most vulnerable and underserved group in these places. In many countries, urban centres receive the majority of resources, leaving rural youth with limited access to essential services, including those related to mental health, substance use and harm reduction.

In Eastern and Southern Africa, the disparity between urban and rural healthcare services is stark. Rural areas often lack the necessary infrastructure, trained personnel and youth-focused services, leaving young people who use drugs particularly vulnerable to drug-related harms. This limited access heightens health risks and restricts opportunities for lifesaving care. Similarly, in India, where a significant portion of the population lives in rural regions with inadequate healthcare, young people face considerable challenges in obtaining health services.³⁶ The concentration of harm reduction programmes in urban centres leaves rural youth, especially in northeastern states like Manipur and Nagaland, without sufficient support.³⁷ This service gap further complicates efforts to address substance use issues. In the USA, the overdose crisis has severely impacted rural communities, including young people, who often face difficulties in accessing harm reduction services. The scarcity of youth-friendly services in these areas has contributed to rising overdose rates, underscoring the urgent need to expand these services in underserved regions.³⁸

ADDRESSING STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST YOUNG WOMEN, YOUNG LGBTQI+ PEOPLE AND YOUNG MIGRANTS

Young people face stigma surrounding drug use which can be particularly harsh. In conservative societies, such as those in the Middle East and North Africa, young women who use drugs are often stigmatised and excluded, and face both social ostracism and harsh legal penalties like corporal punishment.³⁹ This stigma discourages them from accessing harm reduction services or seeking support, increasing their vulnerability to health risks such as HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Young migrants also face significant challenges in accessing harm reduction services. With the current state of harm reduction provision already being limited to legal citizens in many countries across the world, young migrants and refugees have little to no access to harm reduction services. In Europe, for example, young migrants often encounter language barriers, cultural differences and legal restrictions that prevent them from receiving appropriate care. Countries like Greece and Italy, which serve as entry points into Europe for many migrants, struggle to provide adequate health services to migrant populations, and when healthcare is received it is often inadequate or insufficient. Migrants in irregular situations are often unaware of the services they are entitled to due to a lack of targeted information regarding their rights which results in many people not being able to access healthcare services even when they are available. This leaves young migrants at increased risk of HIV, STIs and other blood-borne diseases.⁴⁰

LGBTQI+ youth, particularly young transgender people, often experience discrimination and violence both within their communities and from healthcare providers. In countries like Russia⁴¹ and Uganda⁴², where anti-LGBTQI+ sentiments and laws are widespread, young LGBTQI+ people face severe difficulties in accessing harm reduction services. The fear of discrimination and legal repercussions

can lead young LGBTQI+ people to avoid healthcare services altogether, which further compounds their marginalisation.⁴³ Addressing stigma and discrimination is crucial to improving access to harm reduction services for young people. This includes comprehensive education, training for healthcare providers and the implementation of non-discriminatory policies. Ensuring that young people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or migration status, can receive the care they need without fear of judgement or exclusion is essential to their wellbeing.

WAYS TO IMPROVE HARM REDUCTION SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADOLESCENTS

UN agencies have not yet formally outlined the elements that are needed for effective youth-friendly harm reduction services, but research from youth-led organisations highlights crucial components. For example, Youth Lead, Youth RISE and Y+’s *Harm Reduction Services for Young People Who Use Drugs: Case studies report*, which details specific examples of how programmes and initiatives around the world tailor their services to young people, lays out recommendations to ensure harm reduction services truly meet the needs of this population.⁴⁴ Key to effective services is the meaningful engagement of young people who use drugs in all aspects of service planning, implementation and evaluation. Including young people who use drugs as peer workers in harm reduction initiatives can make other young people more likely to relate to those services and trust them. Organisations such as CORE in Oregon, USA,⁴⁵ Trip! in Toronto, Canada⁴⁶ and Juana Banga in Lithuania⁴⁷ ensure this meaningful engagement by including young people who use drugs in decision making relating to services and including them in governance structures. These organisations also include young people who use drugs as peer workers in outreach activities and provide services like peer-to-peer counselling.⁴⁸ They do this because

young people may find it easier to discuss sensitive issues with their peers who have been through similar experiences.

Specialised programmes should address the unique needs of young people, offering comprehensive, evidence-based education on substance use, harm reduction and sexual health. Utilising digital platforms and social media can make these programmes more engaging and relevant to young people. Lighthouse Social Enterprises, which runs the youth-friendly High Fun initiative in Vietnam, offers online platforms such as GTown to provide online outreach and a virtual community space covering topics like chemsex and risk reduction.⁴⁹

Creating a non-judgmental, supportive environment within harm reduction services is crucial. Key to achieving this is creating physical safe spaces and drop-in centres that are tailored to young people; DrogArt in Slovenia is a good example of this.⁵⁰ To create such an environment, staff should be trained to address the specific concerns of young people, including issues related to mental health, gender, sexuality and cultural background. It is also important to provide trainings and education to existing healthcare service providers (such as healthcare professionals in family planning clinics) to make these spaces more youth-friendly and the staff less judgmental.⁵¹ This approach can reduce stigma and encourage young people to seek help without fear of discrimination or legal consequences. Services should be offered without age restrictions or parental consent requirements, ensuring confidentiality to increase accessibility.

Improving accessibility also involves expanding services to rural and underserved areas, offering flexible hours and integrating harm reduction into existing youth-focused health and social services. Mobile units and pop-up clinics at events that young people attend can help reach those less likely to visit traditional healthcare settings. To support this, targeted outreach and public information campaigns should be designed to raise young people’s awareness about available services in ways that young people will engage with and trust.

“ Key to effective services is the meaningful engagement of young people who use drugs in all aspects of service planning, implementation and evaluation.”

Policy developments

Adolescents and young people are disproportionately affected by drug laws and policies, yet progress in youth-friendly harm reduction services has been slow.⁵² Globally, there is a growing recognition of the need to address the unique challenges faced by young people who use drugs. A 2023 report by Dr. Tlaleng Mofokeng, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health for the UN, highlighted the need for tailored interventions for young people, noting the negative impact of punitive policies on their access to healthcare.⁵³

National efforts have seen some improvements. In Canada, recent policy changes have expanded youth-friendly services like drug consumption rooms and naloxone distribution. Portugal has integrated harm reduction services into its broader healthcare system, including drug checking at youth-centric events like festivals.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain. Many policies still fail to fully address the needs of young people who use drugs, especially in regions where punitive measures overshadow harm reduction, such as Southeast Asia where countries like the Philippines have harsh anti-drug policies. This is also the case in parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East where criminalisation continues to take precedence over health-focused approaches. This is despite the global community, including organisations like UNAIDS and OHCHR, advocating for more inclusive drug policies that prioritise health over punishment.

Recommendations for designing services



Ensure programming is engaging and relevant for young people who use drugs



Engage young people in developing the spaces where harm reduction services are provided



Create a non-judgemental and supportive environment



Integrate harm reduction into existing youth-focused health and social services



Acknowledge poly-drug use, addressing different drugs and drug combinations



Sensitise and educate youth service providers and parents, while always respecting the rights of young people and prioritising their wellbeing



Provide staff with necessary support and training so they are sensitive to young people's specific concerns and experiences, including those related to mental health, gender, sexuality and cultural background



Pay attention to intersectionality – some young people may belong to more than one marginalised group

Recommendations for monitoring and evaluating services



Involve young people in monitoring and evaluating services



Involve young people in recommending changes and adapting approaches to service provision

Recommendations for creating enabling and supportive legal environments



Advocate for non-prohibitionist drug policies, and policies that do not criminalise conduct associated with sex, reproduction, HIV, homelessness and poverty



Advocate for the removal of legal barriers to assist underage people who use drugs



Advocate for the collection of disaggregated data on young people who use drugs

Recommendations for providing services



Provide comprehensive, evidence-based education on substance use, harm reduction practices and sexual health



Provide a comprehensive package of services in one location



Use digital platforms and social media



Hire young people who use drugs as staff members



Prioritise youth-led peer initiatives



Do not require parental consent for young people to use services



Remove age-related barriers to access



Guarantee privacy and confidentiality



Provide youth-specific services



Reach young people who use drugs where they are by employing youth peers and expanding outreach to areas where young people who use drugs gather



Expand services to rural and underserved areas



Have flexible opening hours

Recommendations for providing services



Provide mobile units and pop-up clinics at events that young people go to, such as festivals and community gatherings



Provide evidence-based, judgement-free information, presented in ways that will appeal to young people



Provide fun and recreational activities



Increase young people's awareness of available services through targeted outreach and public information campaigns



Foster autonomy and decision making among adolescents and young people who use drugs



Inform young people about other youth-friendly services and provide referrals



Invest in building a relevant network of non-stigmatising and youth-friendly healthcare providers for referrals and support

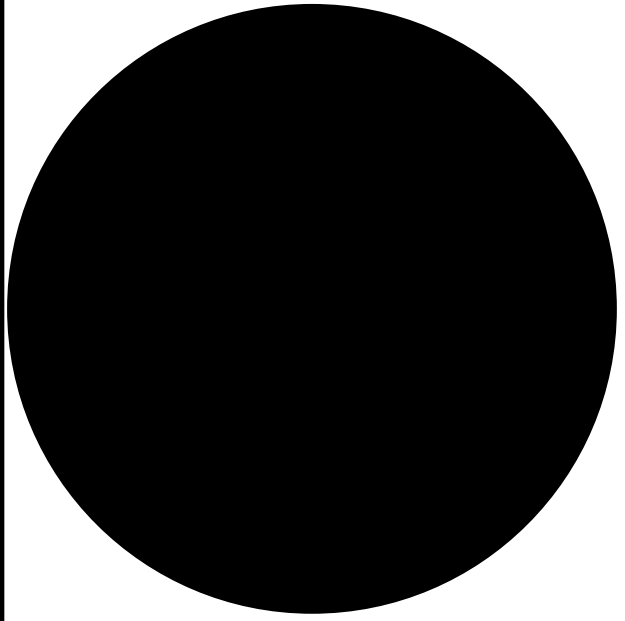
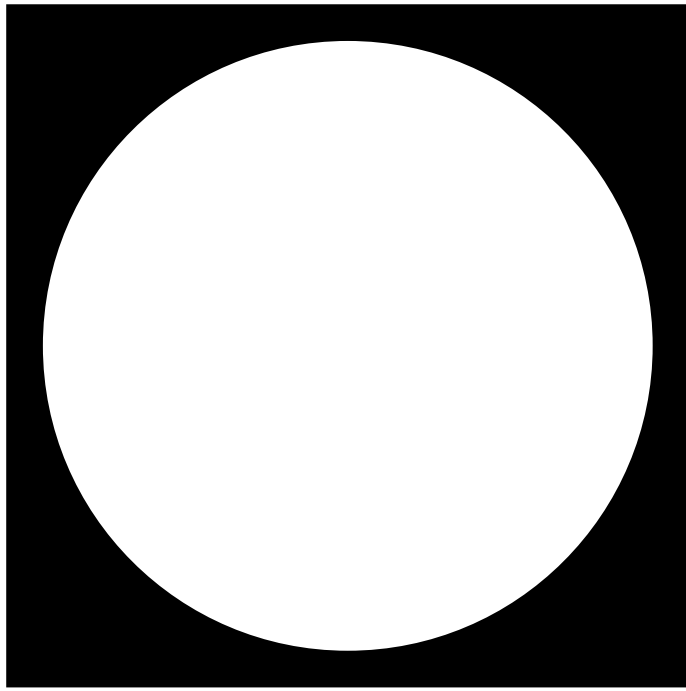


Enable capacity building and knowledge sharing among harm reduction, health and social services providers



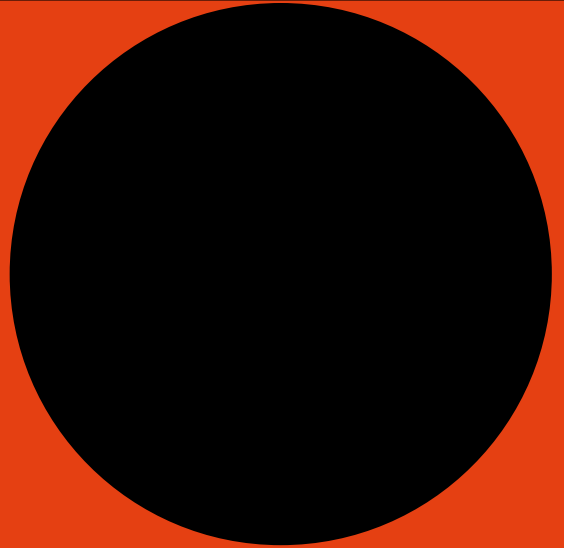
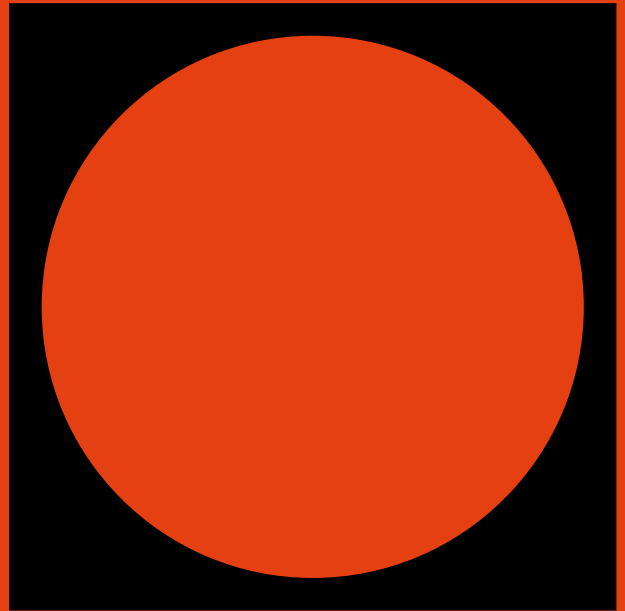
Document and share information about your activities with young people who use drugs

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REGIONAL CHAPTERS

REGIONAL OVERVIEW: ASIA



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN ASIA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Bangladesh	34,370	4.1	33.2	7	✓ 44	✓ M	×	×	×
Bhutan	nd ^f	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Brunei Darussalam	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Cambodia	4,136	15.2	30.4	nd	✓ 5	✓ M	×	×	×
China	nd	5	71.6	19.6	✓ 578	✓ M	×	×	×
Hong Kong	738	nd	nd	nd	×	✓ M	×	×	×
India	288,717	9.03	44.71	19.2	✓ 266	✓ B M	nd	×	×
Indonesia	34,517	39.1	89.2	nd	✓ 194	✓ M	×	×	✓
Japan	nd	0.02	36.4	8.6	×	×	×	×	×
Laos	1,661	7.4	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Macau	<100	2.7	39	12	✓ 1	✓ M B	×	×	×
Malaysia	60,000	7.5	55.2	2.9	✓ 477	✓ M	×	×	×
Maldives	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	✓ M B	×	×	×
Mongolia	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Myanmar	92,798	34.9	56	7.7	✓ 51	✓ M	✓	×	×
Nepal	37,822	2.8	13.3	0.8	✓ 60	✓ M	×	×	×
North Korea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Philippines	7,700	29	35.2	7.12	×	×	×	×	×
Singapore	3,470	nd	47	nd	×	×	×	×	×
South Korea	nd	1.9	39.7	4	×	×	×	×	×
Sri Lanka	2,672	0	6.2	0.1	×	×	×	×	×
Taiwan	60,000	16	93.1	20.8	✓ 1,252	✓ M B	×	×	×
Thailand	57,640	8.2	42.2	3.5	✓ 30	✓ M	×	×	×
Vietnam	189,000	12.1	72.51	17.07	✓ 56	✓ M	×	×	×

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy.

B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone

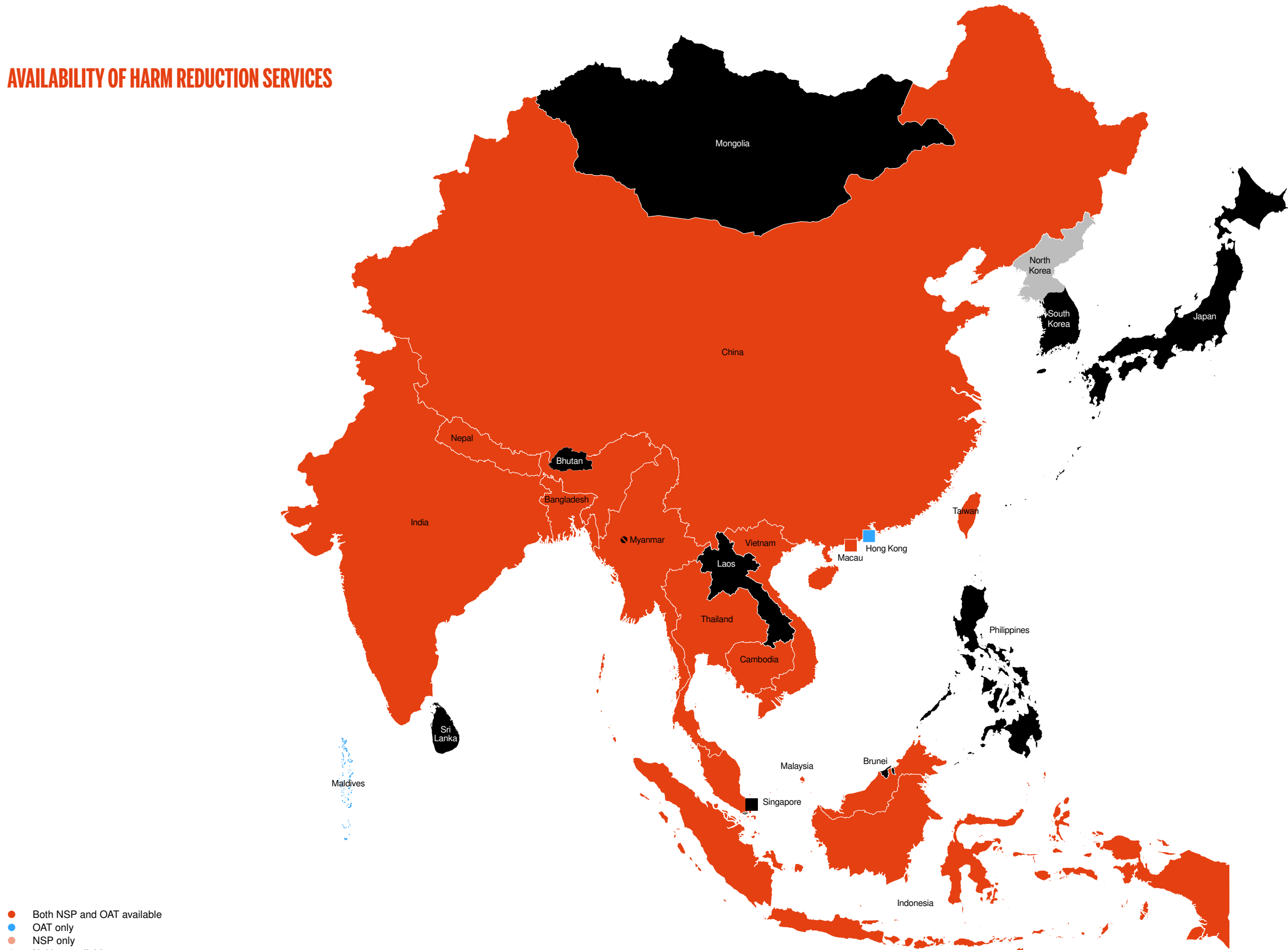
c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES



NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



12 countries (50%) in Asia provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



14 countries (58%) in Asia provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)



No country in Asia provides **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



Indonesia is the only country in Asia which provides **safer smoking kits** (no change from 2022)

KEY ISSUE

PUNITIVE DRUG LAWS HOLD BACK HARM REDUCTION

From marginalisation and incarceration of people who use drugs, to executions and extrajudicial killings, Asia's punitive drug laws continue to hold back efforts to promote harm reduction. However,

there is growing recognition within the region, including from some government officials,^{1,2} that a zero-tolerance approach to drugs has had staggering humanitarian, social and economic costs and a different strategy is needed.^{3,4}

In December 2023, Sri Lanka's government launched Operation Yukthiya, which led to tens of thousands of people being arrested over four months. From the beginning, the campaign was marked by an intensification of public humiliation, arbitrary arrests, detention in inhumane conditions and other human rights violations which have long characterised the Sri Lankan government's approach to drugs.^{5,6} In Indonesia, the election of Prabowo Subianto in March 2024 has raised concerns of a further escalation of the country's punitive approach to drugs, given Subianto's vocal support for the death penalty for drug offences.⁷

In the Philippines, there have been some welcome developments, like the dropping of trumped-up

charges against staunch drug war critic Leila de Lima as well as government participation in a recently-held Drug Policy and Law Reform Summit.^{8,9,10,11} Despite this, 700 drug-related killings have been documented since former President Duterte left office,¹² and neither the former President nor his high-ranking officials have been held accountable for their actions.^{13,14} Crucially, the government has yet to go beyond rhetoric in pursuing a scientific, evidence-based and health-centred approach that fully respects human rights.^{15,16}

Anti-drug campaigns in the region are initiated by leaders like Duterte, Sri Lanka's Ranil Wickremesinghe and Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina, who use drugs and 'drug wars' as populist tropes.¹⁷ They are ultimately sustained by broader political attitudes towards drugs and enabled by punitive (and often longstanding) laws that conflate drug use with criminality and curtail harm reduction approaches.¹⁸ These laws often single out drug-related offences. For instance, all of the at least 15 executions that Singapore carried out in 2022 and 2023 were for drug-related offences.^{19,20} Even in affluent countries in the region, laws that criminalise and harshly punish any kind of involvement with drugs harms individuals and entire communities. This is illustrated by the suicide of South Korean actor Lee Sun-kyun following allegations of drug use and the trauma and stigmatisation experienced by LGBTQI+ people in Singapore.^{21,22}

Civil society organisations (CSOs) in the region are valiantly challenging these laws and engaging with their respective governments to find ways forward.^{23,24} Lawmakers are also exploring legislative reforms, such as the Japanese parliamentarians who recently formed a harm reduction group.²⁵ Developments like Malaysia's apparent commitment to decriminalising drugs²⁶ and Nepal's strong support for harm reduction in its new *National Master Plan on Drugs*^{27,25} may make neighbouring countries rethink their own laws and policies. As Thailand's indecision on the legal status of cannabis shows, these moves can be illusory and highly contingent on political currents,²⁸ but they can nonetheless pave the way for more humane, evidence-based and cost-effective drug policies in the region.

“ Many harm reduction programmes are designed for injecting drug use, even as drug use in the region has continued to shift to methamphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants.”

KEY ISSUE

DISPARITIES IN DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICES

As *Global State of Harm Reduction* reports indicate, several countries in Asia have many harm reduction services. While these are welcome developments, there lies a more complicated picture of geographic and socio-economic disparities in the distribution of harm reduction programmes.

In 12 Indian states and Union territories, for instance, at least 95% of people who inject drugs are covered by a package of harm reduction services, but coverage figures are only 22% for the state of Assam, 31% for Haryana and 39% for Delhi.^{29,30} Opioid agonist therapy (OAT) coverage in Thailand overall is dismally low at 5.2%; it is even lower in Bangkok at 1.8%,³¹ despite non-governmental organisations and CSOs in the capital attracting clients from the provinces due to their perceived non-judgmental attitudes.^{32,33}

Socioeconomic marginality comes with additional barriers to accessing harm reduction services, including being singled out by law enforcement and facing further stigma and discrimination. For instance, the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh are simultaneously exploited by drug traffickers and blamed by the government for bringing drugs into the country; they have been disproportionately targeted by the drug war along with the country's urban poor.^{34,35} Crucially, marginalised communities are also on the receiving end of the structural drivers of harms related to drug policies.^{36,37,38}

Many harm reduction programmes are designed for injecting drug use,³⁹ even as drug use in the region has continued to shift to methamphetamine and amphetamine-type stimulants.^{40,41} Governments in the region have also disproportionately targeted these drugs in their punitive campaigns.^{42,43} These disparities are further complicated by continued dependence on international support for harm reduction in countries like Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, making services, as well as the CSOs that provide them, financially and politically precarious.^{44,45,46}

Encouragingly, there are also some positive developments. In Myanmar, harm reduction services have continued despite the country's political situation, even in conflict-affected areas like Sagaing, Kachin and Shan State.⁴⁷ In Vietnam, community health workers are enabling the provision of OAT in rural areas as far as 55 kilometres away from clinics. In Bangkok, Thailand a new facility specifically catering to LGBTQI+ people who inject drugs opened in November 2022, integrating health and harm reduction services.^{48,49} In Kaohsiung, Taiwan, a health centre specifically for chemsex adopted a new community- and person-centered social enterprise model in 2022, and received 1,576 clients in its first 10 months.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the incorporation of harm reduction services in Malaysia's healthcare system through One Stop Crisis Centres is increasing access and improving trust.⁵⁰

Scaling up these initiatives and engendering people-centered drug policies in the process^{51,52} will require greater and more tailored investments from international and national sources, meaningful involvement of people who use drugs, and broader recognition of the economic, health and social benefits of harm reduction.

NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ASIA



Sri Lanka’s government launched Operation Yukthiya, which led to tens of thousands of people being arrested over four months, public humiliation, arbitrary arrests, detention in inhumane conditions and other human rights violations

Indonesia’s President Prabowo Subianto expressed support for the death penalty for drug offences



Drug-related killings in the Philippines have continued since former President Duterte left office

Countries like Singapore continue to execute people for drug offences. All of the at least 15 executions that Singapore carried out in 2022 and 2023 were for drug-related offences

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN ASIA

Japanese parliamentarians formed a harm reduction group



Malaysia committed to decriminalising drugs

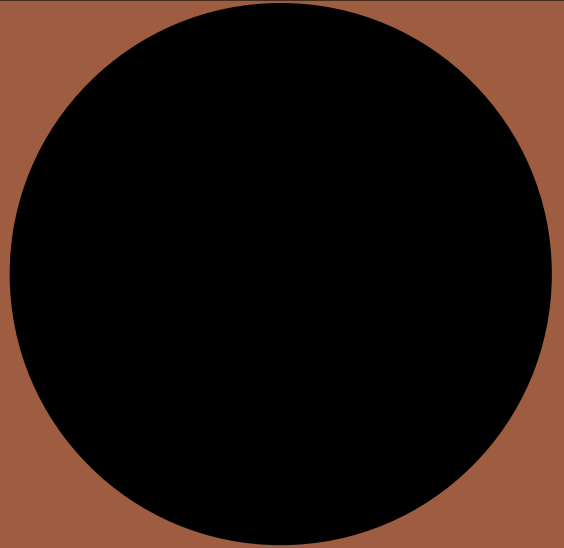
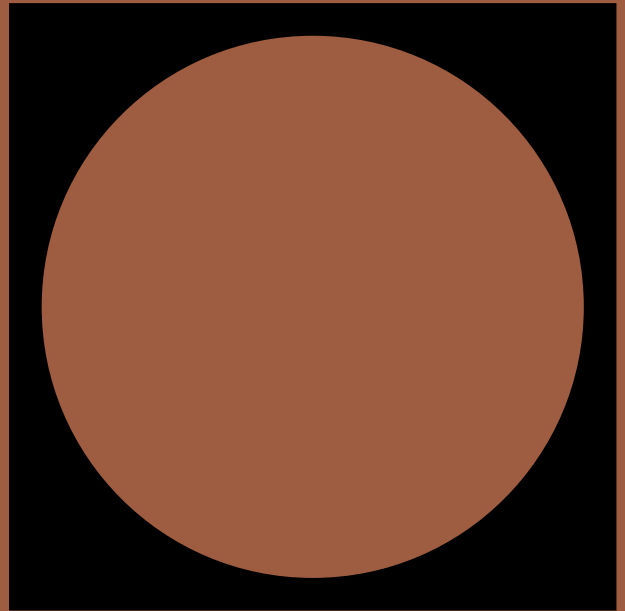


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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Angola	nd ^f	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Botswana	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Comoros	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eritrea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Eswatini	1,279	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Ethiopia	4,068	39.5	3.4	5.1	×	×	×	×	×
Kenya	27,056	11.3	20	3.9	✓ 10	✓ M B	✓	×	×
Lesotho	2,600	nd	nd	nd	×	×	nd	nd	nd
Madagascar	18,500	35.5	5.6	5.3	×	×	nd	nd	nd
Malawi	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Mauritius	12,000	32.3	90	3.5	✓ 1	✓ M B N	×	×	×
Mozambique	33,000	35.5	43.6	24.2	✓ 1	✓ M	×	×	×
Namibia	930	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Rwanda	2,000	9.5	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Seychelles	2,000	12.6	79.1	0.3	✓ 2	✓ M	×	×	×
South Africa	75,701	21	55	5	✓ 11	✓ M B N	×	×	✓
South Sudan	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Uganda	9,500	17	2	8.4	✓ 1	✓ M B N	×	×	×
United Republic of Tanzania	30,000	14	23.1	6.9	✓ 9	✓ M	×	×	×
Zambia	26,840	24	nd	3.2	×	×	×	×	×
Zimbabwe	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone

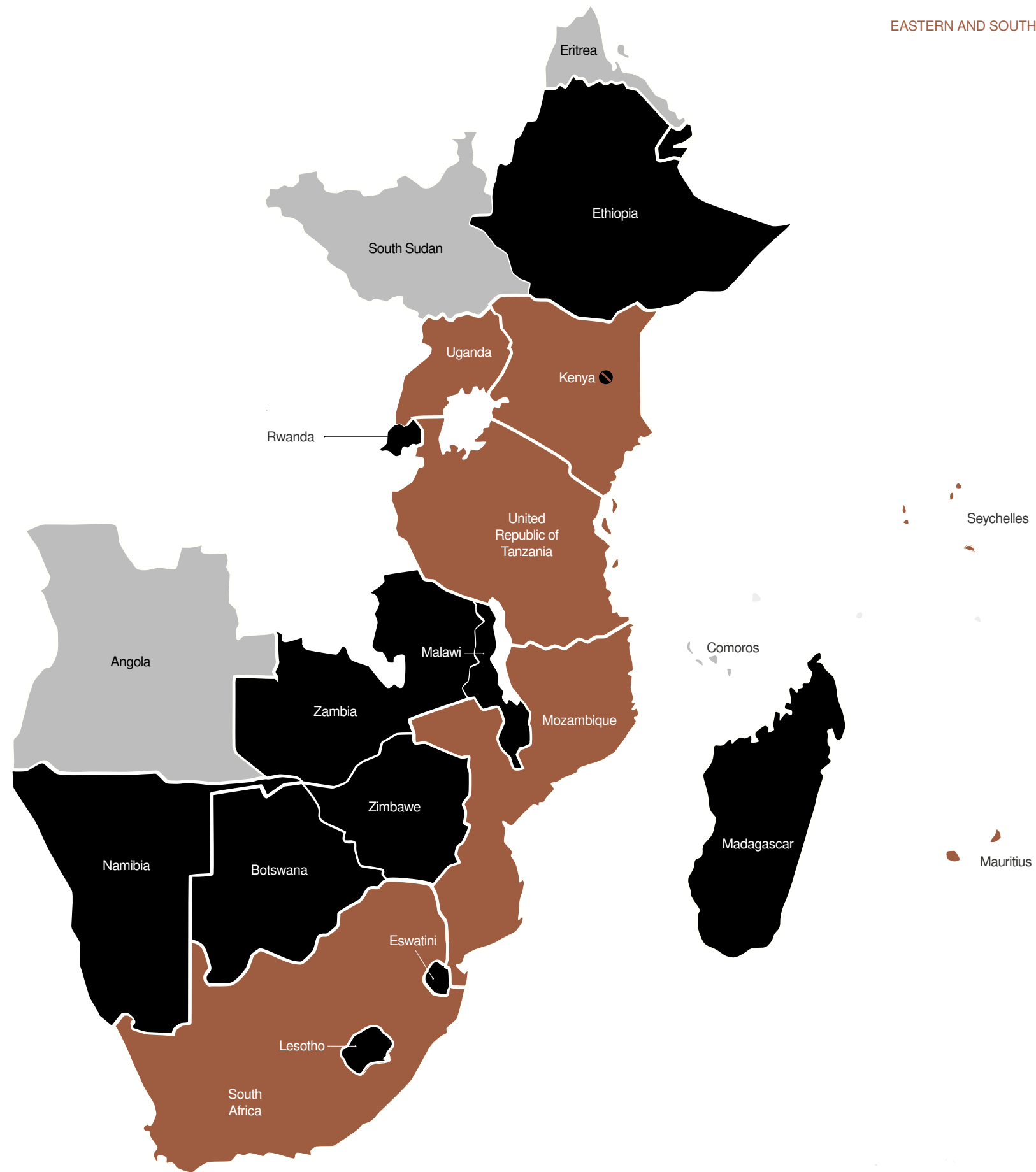
c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

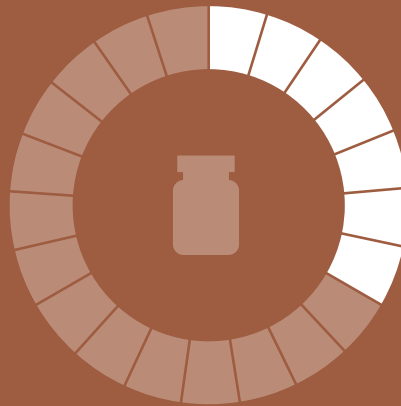


- Both NSP and OAT available
- OAT only
- NSP only
- Neither available
- Not known
- Peer-distribution of naloxone

NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



7 countries (33%) in Eastern and Southern Africa provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



7 countries (33%) in Eastern and Southern Africa provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)

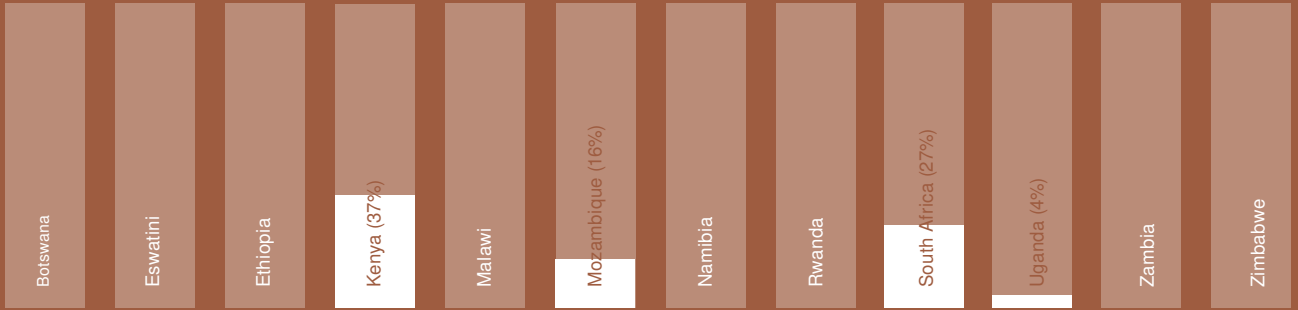


No country in Eastern and Southern Africa provides **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



South Africa is the only country in Eastern and Southern Africa to provide **safer smoking kits** (+1 from 2022)

AVERAGE HARM REDUCTION COVERAGE



HIV PREVALENCE AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS



KEY ISSUE

SUPPORTIVE POLICIES, PUNITIVE PRACTICES

Eastern and Southern Africa has the highest HIV prevalence in the world with more than 20 million (5.9%) people living with HIV.¹ HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs in the region stands at a high of 21.8% – almost four times that of the general population – yet all Eastern and Southern African countries continue to criminalise drug use. This prevents people who use drugs from receiving equitable HIV services compared to the general population.² Repressive drug law enforcement contributes to the barriers people who use drugs face when accessing health services, heightening their HIV risk.^{3,4,5} But progress is being made in the region as there continues to be a shift towards the implementation of some harm reduction services.

Since 2022, three more countries (Botswana, Mozambique and Namibia) produced national policy documents that explicitly support harm reduction. Botswana's *HIV Prevention Road Map 2023-2025* refers to the need to introduce harm reduction interventions, although this is yet to be actualised.⁶ Namibia has included harm reduction, specifically opioid agonist therapy (OAT), in its HIV strategic framework.⁷ Mozambique has included harm reduction in its national HIV plan.⁸ Only two countries in the region are now without supportive policies (Eswatini and Rwanda).

However, there is a lag between policy and practice, as no additional country has initiated OAT or a needle and syringe programme (NSP) since 2022. Although Zimbabwe's *National Drug Master Plan (2020-2025)* outlines harm reduction interventions, including NSP, OAT and naloxone, these are yet to be implemented

despite funds being available through a grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.⁹ In 2022, Mauritius legalised medical cannabis and decriminalised possession of small amounts for personal consumption. Yet, medical cannabis is still not accessible, and people are still being arrested for possessing small amounts of the drug.^{10,11,12} In Rwanda, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Health Development Initiative Rwanda is implementing an advocacy and health service project for people who use drugs. However, this does not include NSP, OAT or naloxone.^{13,14}

Despite notable efforts towards a harm reduction approach, law enforcement and the 'war on drugs' still dominates the region's approach to drug use. In South Africa, in spite of a recent scaling up of harm reduction, punitive responses to drugs continue.^{15,16,17}

According to the Networking HIV and AIDS Community of Southern Africa, in just three months in 2023, programme data revealed 600 human rights violations against people who use drugs, including confiscation of syringes, assaults and unlawful arrests by law enforcement.¹⁸

The NGOs TB/HIV Care and the South African Network of People Who Use Drugs reported that, due to resistance towards harm reduction, there was a three-month shutdown of the NSP in Wynberg,

Cape Town. In Zimbabwe, law enforcement is reported to be running active anti-drug campaigns, including arresting and publicly parading people arrested for drug use.^{19,20,21,22} In Uganda, there were around 4,800 people, including 137 young people, arrested for drug use in 2022.²³ In Botswana, a presidential commission of inquiry on constitutional reforms has recommended that the death penalty be imposed for drug trafficking.²⁴

Although harm reduction has grown in the region, primarily due to advocacy from community and civil society organisations, the prevailing contradiction between policy and practice poses a major barrier to progress. The Eastern and Southern African Commission on Drugs has underscored the need to review the current strategic and policy responses to drug trafficking and drug use in the region to ensure people who use drugs can access healthcare and other vital services.²⁵

KEY ISSUE

DIMINISHING HARM REDUCTION FUNDING

Eastern and Southern Africa has a high rate of poverty, with 45% of people in Southern Africa and 34% in Eastern Africa living below the poverty line.²⁶ Low domestic investment in health is common, with most governments spending less than USD 100 per person annually on healthcare.²⁷ The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) notes that high national debts are a major threat to the HIV response in low-income countries, which can spend up to four times more on debt repayments than on health.²⁸ While some countries in the region have made investments in their national HIV responses, there remains a marked reliance on international donor funding, which undermines the sustainability of a domestic HIV response. For example, Madagascar has seen a 151% increase in new HIV infections and a 279% increase in AIDS-related deaths since 2010.²⁹ In South Sudan, only half of people living with HIV know their status and less than half (47%) are on treatment.³⁰

The South African government funds 70% of its HIV response domestically, but no national funds are allocated to harm reduction; instead, the government allocates resources to ineffective abstinence-based programmes. However, the City of Tshwane funds the Community-Oriented Substance Use Programme, which takes a harm reduction approach, through social contracting.^{a,31} In Uganda, the government has not committed any budget to fund harm reduction.^{32,33} Kenya's HIV response, under which harm reduction falls, remains heavily donor-funded, with only 36.5% of the funding coming

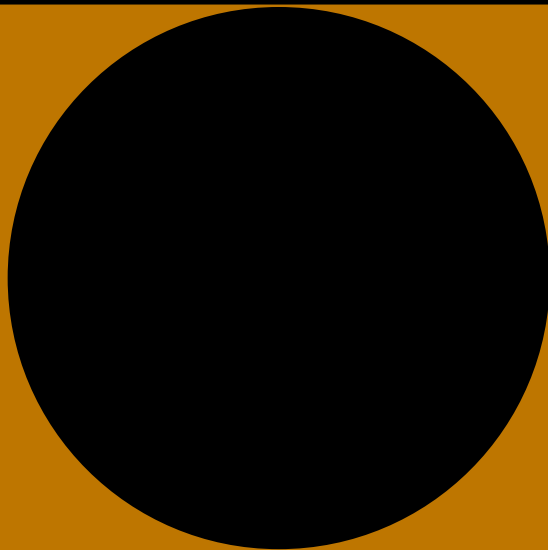
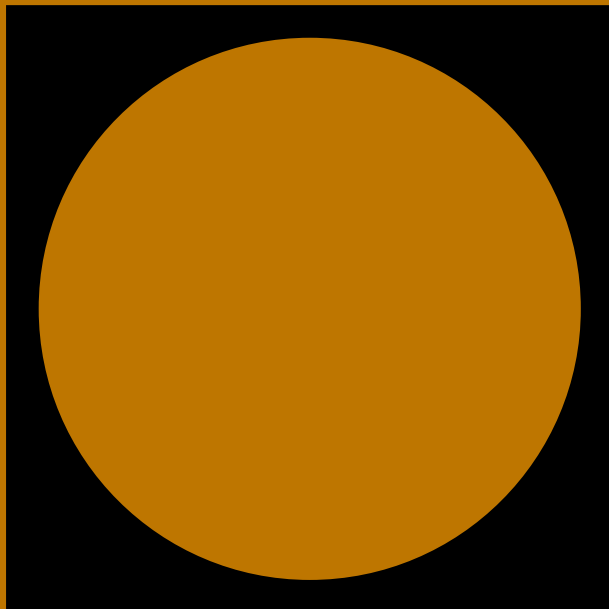
from domestic sources.³⁴ In the financial years 2019-2022, the country's harm reduction programme, which included methadone, buprenorphine, naloxone and hepatitis B and C management, experienced a funding gap of USD 29,398,721.³⁵ Mauritius funds around 80% (approximately USD 1,271,483) of its national HIV programme and partially funds harm reduction in accordance with the *National HIV and AIDS Action Plan 2023-2027*.³⁶ Nevertheless, domestic harm reduction funding decreased from USD 261,198 in 2018 to a predicted USD 228,000 in 2023.³⁷

Community-led networks and civil society organisations across the region underscored the lack of funds as a major barrier to their efforts in relation to both advocacy and service delivery.^{38,39,40} Consequently, access to harm reduction services remains low. The Global Drug Policy Index 2021 reported average harm reduction coverage to be 37% in Kenya, 16% in Mozambique, 27% in South Africa and 4% in Uganda.⁴¹ Yet, drug use is projected to increase by 40% by 2030 in Africa, and East and Southern Africa has become a drug transit hub and destination market.^{42,43} This trend calls for an urgent increase in harm reduction coverage, yet punitive drug law enforcement remains the predominant approach to drug control in the region. The biggest funding boost for harm reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa would be for governments to stop funding punitive approaches to drugs and invest in harm reduction.

“The biggest funding boost for harm reduction in Eastern and Southern Africa would be for governments to stop funding punitive approaches to drugs and invest in harm reduction.”

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: EURASIA



AUTHOR OF EURASIA REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **Maria Plotko**



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN EURASIA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Albania	8,700	0.1	56	18	✓ 2	✓ M B	×	×	×
Armenia	14,000	2.6	49.2	nd ^f	✓ 12	✓ M	×	×	×
Azerbaijan	60,300	6.1	59.3	7.9	✓ 17	✓ M	×	×	×
Belarus	80,000	22.7	59	9.6	✓ 34	✓ M B	×	×	×
Bosnia and Herzegovina	12,500	1.1	30.8	2.5	×	✓ M	×	×	×
Bulgaria	10,000	12.8	78.3	5.9	✓ 2	✓ M M O	×	×	✓
Croatia	6,344	0.3	30.7	3.1	✓ 8 ^g	✓ M B M O	×	×	×
Czechia	44,900	0.1	37.7	0	✓ 111	✓ M B	×	×	✓
Estonia	8,600	54	73	5	✓ 35	✓ M B	×	×	✓
Georgia	49,700	0.9	32.1	2.5	✓ 14	✓ M B	✓	×	×
Hungary	6,500	0	35.9	1	✓ 31	✓ M B	×	×	×
Kazakhstan	79,900	7.6	58.6	8.3	✓ 125	✓ M	×	×	×
Kosovo	4,600	0	23.8	5	✓	✓ M B	×	×	×
Kyrgyzstan	17,379	16.5	64.5	11.3	✓ 14	✓ M B	✓	×	×
Latvia	7,715	26	51.3	0.4	✓ 20	✓ M	×	×	×
Lithuania	8,868	4.7	85.9	4.9	✓ 11	✓ M B	×	×	×
Moldova	27,500	11.4	42.7	5.4	✓ 28	✓ M B	×	×	✓
Montenegro	2,300	0.5	62.8	1.4	✓ 2	✓ M B	×	×	×
North Macedonia	6,500	0	65.4	5.6	✓ 16	✓ M B	×	×	×
Poland	14,664	14-21	57.9	2.9	✓ 7	✓ M B	×	×	×
Romania	10,000	19.4	72.7	3.2	✓ 2	✓ M B	×	×	×
Russia	1,881,000	49.8	72.5	nd	✓	×	×	×	×
Serbia	20,500	1.5	61.4	10.5	✓ 1	✓ M B	×	×	×
Slovakia	8,818	0.1	32.5	6.3	✓ 19	✓ M B	×	×	✓
Slovenia	4,900	0	25	4.2	✓ 12	✓ M B	✓	×	✓
Tajikistan	18,200	8.9	61.3	2	✓ 48	✓ M	✓	×	×
Turkmenistan	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Ukraine	350,000	20.9	67	46.7	✓ 2,380	✓ M B	×	×	×
Uzbekistan	54,500	2.9	20.9	5.1	✓ 230	×	×	×	×

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone.

c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data.

g 8 NSP are fixed and 129 outreach

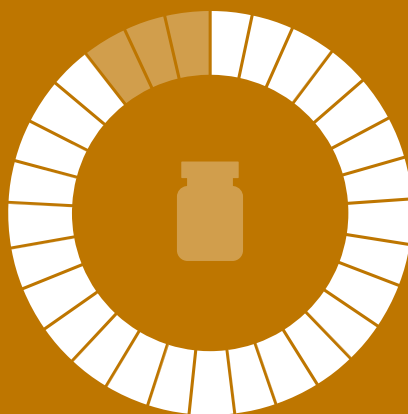
AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES



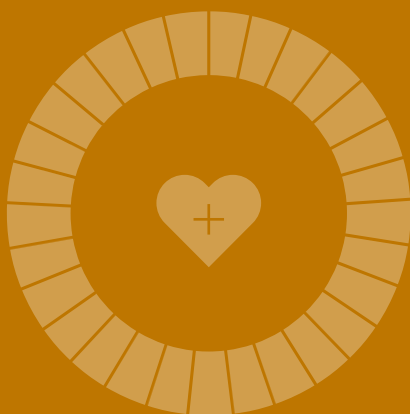
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



27 countries (93%) in Eurasia provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



26 countries (90%) in Eurasia provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)



No country in Eurasia provides **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



6 countries (21%) in Eurasia provides **safer smoking kits** (+1 from 2022, Bulgaria)

KEY ISSUE

CRACKDOWN ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Global donors funded harm reduction in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Eurasia) as an effective tool for HIV prevention and helped to begin and scale-up many needle and syringe programmes (NSP) and opioid agonist therapy (OAT). Harm reduction through an HIV lens was and still is politically safer in the region, while drug policy reform and harm reduction are perceived as foreign ideas contradictory to 'traditional' values.

Laws and policies criminalising sex work, the possession and use of drugs, HIV transmission and same-sex relationships in the region significantly obstruct access to healthcare.

With most harm reduction programmes still reliant on international funding, the growing number of foreign agent and anti-LGBTQI+ laws poses a significant threat to the continuation of HIV-related services and support for key population groups.^{a,1}

Representatives from Georgia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan who responded to the *Global State of Harm Reduction* survey² stated that civil society organisations in their countries are under threat for delivering or being involved in harm reduction services and advocacy. Representatives from Russia and Tajikistan reported decreases in the number of NSPs.

Russia was the first country in the region to introduce specific laws targeting civil society organisations that do not support government policy and/or are supported by international funding. At the heart of this issue are four main laws: the law on foreign agents, the law on undesirable organisations, and the so-called drug and LGBTQI+ propaganda laws. The vaguely worded Foreign Agent Law,³ adopted in 2012, has been used as a tool to stigmatise, discredit and silence NGOs critical of authorities, and it has forced international donors to gradually withdraw their support. Over 320 NGOs in Russia have been labelled as foreign agents since the law was enacted.⁴ In 2016, the Andrey Rylkov Foundation (ARF), an organisation that provides harm reduction services and is actively engaged in drug policy reform, became the first public health organisation to be listed as a foreign agent. Steep fines for not complying with the new regulations and additional reporting requirements, especially for smaller organisations, make it difficult to secure funding and operate which forces organisations to shut down. In 2018, ARF was fined USD 12,000, which it was able to pay through crowdfunding.⁵ In June 2024, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgment⁶ (*Case of Andrey Rylkov Foundation and Others v. Russia*) highlighting the ongoing misuse of repressive laws in Russia aimed at stifling dissent and suppressing civic freedom.

Russia's draconian drug propaganda law⁷ criminalises not only advocacy for harm reduction and drug policy reform, but even pictures of controlled substances and any kind of discussion

a UNAIDS considers gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs and prisoners and other incarcerated people as the five main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

that is not in line with prohibitionist values.^{8,9} It also describes ‘propaganda’ relating to drug use for medical purposes, which is generally understood as a ban on advocating for OAT.

Such crackdowns on civil society instil fear and self-censorship. Russia’s repression of NGOs serves as a blueprint for neighbouring countries, where similar laws are either in place or under consideration. These countries include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Hungary and Georgia. Hungary enacted similarly repressive legislation when it passed the Russian-like Sovereignty Protection Act in 2023.^{10,11} In March 2024, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders criticised the dissolution of 700 NGOs in Tajikistan. In the same year, laws similar to the Russian Foreign Agent law were adopted in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia.¹² Serbia¹³ and Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴ also attempted to pass similar laws but were unsuccessful. Civil society is fighting against these crackdowns where possible. In Kazakhstan, for example, civil society is campaigning to save OAT and stop an anti-LGBTQI+ law from being adopted. The law on foreign representatives adopted in April 2024^{15,16} in Kyrgyzstan grants the authorities extensive oversight over NGOs engaging in what is broadly termed political activities and receiving foreign funding. Failure to register as a foreign representative could result in an NGO’s operations being suspended for up to six months without a court order, and possibly forced liquidation. Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan, which among other activities had been providing legal support for key populations, has already closed down. Harm reduction NGOs have ceased their advocacy activities and smaller community organisations have announced their plans to shut down pre-emptively. In Georgia, the law on transparency of foreign influence,^{17,18,19} branded by civil society as the ‘Russian law’, was adopted in May 2024 despite the president vetoing it. It declares civil society and media organisations which receive more than 20% of their funding from

foreign sources as ‘organisations acting in the interest of a foreign power’. Such organisations are now required to register as such and are subject to increased reporting requirements, inspections and administrative liability, including the equivalent of up to more than EUR 9,000 in fines for violations. In recent months, the government has launched a smear campaign against many NGOs and media organisations, accusing them of acting on behalf of foreign governments and undermining the Georgian state. The bylaws are still underway, and it is not clear how the law will be applied, but civil society already feels the threat if they are involved in harm reduction services and advocacy.²⁰ Those who register as foreign representatives could end up having to self-censor and stop advocacy work. At the same time, the Georgian parliament has advanced the set of bills that include bans on promoting same-sex relationships and gender reassignment surgeries.²¹

Foreign agents laws pose serious threats to organisations engaged in advocacy, community development, the documentation of human rights violations, and harm reduction.

This undermines the achievements of the globally agreed goal to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, making it challenging to support community-led responses and significantly reduce stigma and discrimination against key populations.²² International bodies and officials have condemned recent developments in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia.^{23,24,25,26,27,28} Urgent international attention and support are essential to safeguard harm reduction, community-led HIV responses and human rights in the region.

“ Russia’s repression of NGOs serves as a blueprint for neighbouring countries, where similar laws are either in place or under consideration. These countries include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Hungary and Georgia.”

KEY ISSUE

CHALLENGES ADVANCING DRUG CHECKING SERVICES

The implementation of drug checking services in Eurasia, despite operating in a legally grey area, represents a critical step forward. Nine out of 28 countries have introduced the service to some extent, mostly through the support of international donors or donations, except for Czechia and Slovenia where the service is funded by the state. Ukraine is unique, as drug checking is supported through the national grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. A pilot project in Croatia to distribute reagent test kits through a drop-in centre in Rijeka is awaiting approval from the Ministry of Health.

According to the current legislation in all Eurasia countries, staff in drug checking services are not allowed to come into contact with substances and perform tests themselves due to the laws criminalising possession of controlled substances, which makes possessing the sample or giving the sample back to the user illegal. To mitigate this issue, organisations distribute colorimetric reagent test kits to clients so they can perform the tests themselves. Reagents are chemicals that turn different colours in the presence of certain drugs. They are useful for learning more about the general content of the substance in hand and identifying 'red flags' (i.e. unexpected substances). Reagent test kits are only able to detect the presence of a drug, not the quantity or purity. All drug checking is community-led, and programme staff provide counselling, basic harm reduction supplies and educational materials.²⁹

In Slovenia, drug checking is part of the National Early Warning System on Psychoactive Substances coordinated by the National Institute of Public Health. The DrogArt³⁰ drug checking service collects substances through several harm reduction sites, packs them in specially labelled envelopes and sends them to the National Laboratory for Health, Environment and Food for analysis. Results are provided in four to seven days. Colorimetric reagent tests are also available at harm reduction stands in nightlife settings.

In Hungary, Estonia, Czechia,³¹ Lithuania, Slovakia, Georgia, Ukraine and Poland, NGOs distribute reagent test kits, mostly in nightlife settings and during music festivals. After a consultation, the clients perform the tests themselves and are invited to come back to discuss the results. The Ukrainian Drugstore project, in addition to distributing test kits during parties,³² provides drug checking and online counselling services via its website and app Free2Ask.³³

The Polish Social Drug Policy Initiative³⁴ has been working at events in clubs and at music festivals since 2015 where it provides harm reduction services, including reagent test kits, psychological counselling and educational information. The Polish PRO Test, run by the organisation Chemical Safety, operates as a social business.³⁵ Its website offers colorimetric tests for purchase and educational materials, and in cooperation with local NGOs it provides harm reduction information and publishes alerts for dangerous substances.

Czechia, Georgia and Lithuania also have walk-in drug checking facilities. In Czechia, test kits can be accessed in NSP sites. In Georgia, the NGO Mandala,³⁶ and in Lithuania the NGO Young Wave,³⁷ mainly work with young people who use drugs. Both organisations have offices in the respective capitals where people can come to collect test kits.

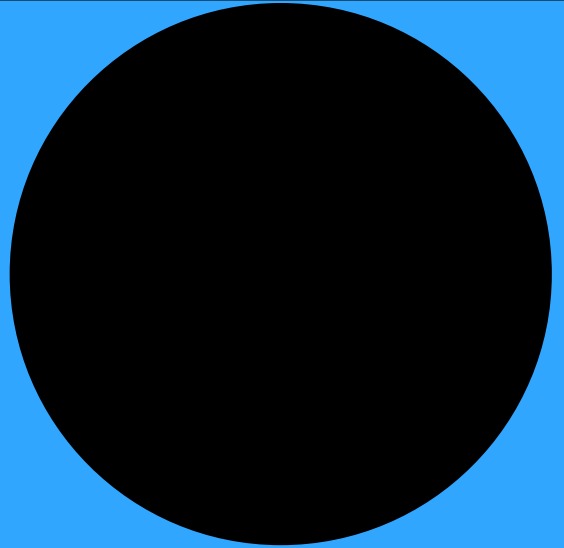
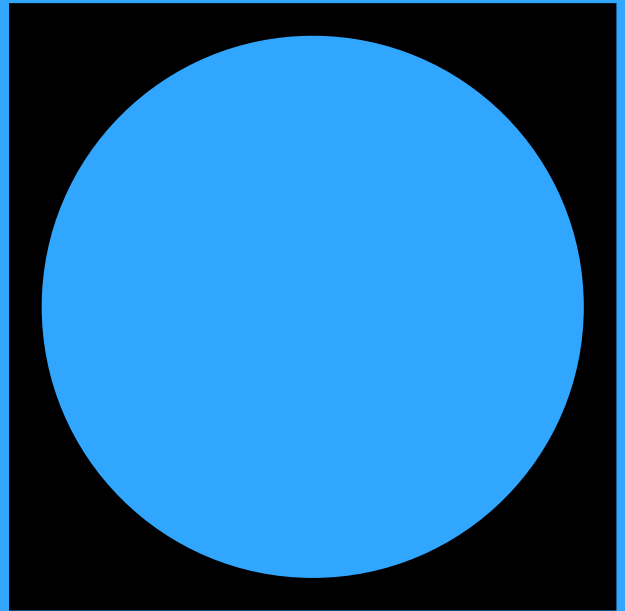
Since drug checking is not supported by the state in most countries, organisations struggle to provide uninterrupted services. The lack of resources also prevents these services from expanding. Georgia, Czechia, Ukraine and Croatia report³⁸ that only a very limited number of people who need them have access to drug checking services. In 2023, to expand drug checking in the country, the Addiction Research Centre Alternative Georgia started providing drug checking kits through syringe vending machines in Tbilisi.³⁹ The primary goal of the vending machines is to access hard-to-reach groups of people who use drugs and to cover underserved geographical areas. Vending machines were installed near pharmacies and served both the general population and people

who inject drugs. Harm reduction services distribute plastic cards to people who use drugs, who can use them to access a hidden menu on the machine, allowing them to obtain an HIV prevention kit.⁴⁰

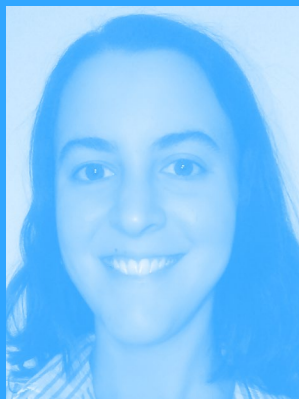
Colorimetric tests are a very basic tool that can serve as a gateway for implementing comprehensive drug checking services. Introducing this service without waiting for legal changes once again highlights community efforts to meet the needs of people who use drugs, address the overdose crisis and provide essential harm reduction tools despite restrictive operating environments. Continued support and expansion of these services is crucial for supporting the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs and addressing the evolving challenges of drug use, particularly in relation to the spread of new psychoactive substances in the region.

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Antigua and Barbuda	nd ^f	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Argentina	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	✓ M	×	×	×
Bahamas	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Barbados	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Belize	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Bolivia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Brazil	nd	nd	48.6	nd	✓	×	×	×	✓
Chile	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Colombia	6,601	5.7	30.5	nd	✓ 7	✓ M	✓	✓ 1	×
Costa Rica	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Cuba	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Dominica	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Dominican Republic	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Ecuador	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
El Salvador	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Grenada	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Guatemala	nd	No	No	No	×	×	×	×	×
Guyana	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Haiti	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Honduras	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Jamaica	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Mexico	150,000	15.8	nd	nd	✓ 3	✓ M B N	✓	✓ 2	✓
Nicaragua	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Panama	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Paraguay	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Peru	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	✓ M B	×	×	×
Puerto Rico	nd	6	78.4	nd	✓ 9	✓ M B N	✓	×	✓
Saint Kitts and Nevis	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Saint Lucia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Suriname	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Trinidad and Tobago	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd
Uruguay	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd	×	×	×
Venezuela	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone.

c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

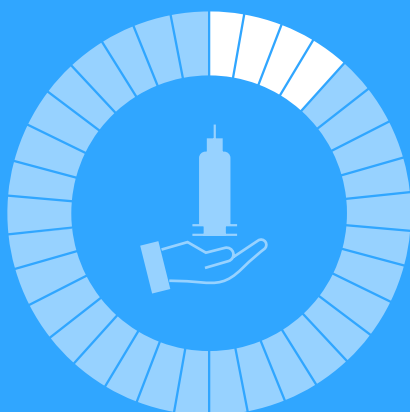
d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

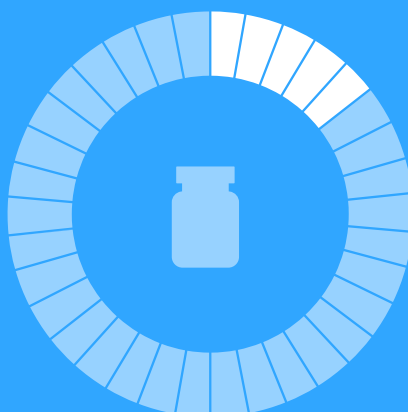
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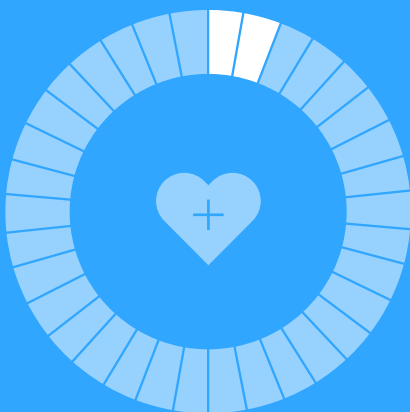
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



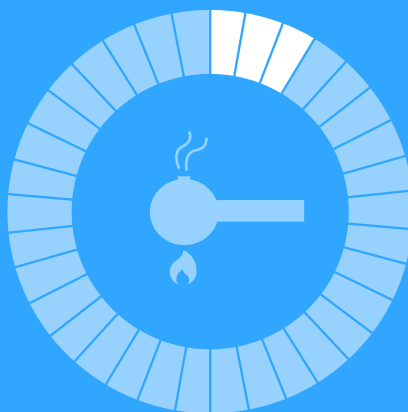
4 countries (12%) in Latin America and the Caribbean provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



5 countries (15%) in Latin America and the Caribbean provide **opioid agonist therapy** (+1 from 2022, Perú)



2 countries (6%) in Latin America and the Caribbean provide **drug consumption rooms** (+1 from 2022, Colombia)



3 countries (9%) in Latin America and the Caribbean provide **safer smoking kits** (+2 from 2022, Mexico and Puerto Rico)

KEY ISSUE

UNEVEN PROGRESS AND SETBACKS

The policy landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean is characterised by a mix of progress and setbacks. There are more progressive administrations in countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and Chile, and conservative-leaning administrations in Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Paraguay and the Caribbean countries. This mixed trend is even evident within single countries, where harm reduction strategies and punitive approaches to drug use exist simultaneously.

Uruguay makes explicit reference to harm reduction in its national drug policy strategies.^{1,2} Colombia,³ Mexico⁴ and Brazil⁵ are currently reviewing their national drug policies and incorporating new perspectives, including those from civil society organisations. Although Brazil's *National Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs* (law 11.343/2006)⁶ was implemented in 2006, some changes were made during the Bolsonaro administration towards a more punitive approach.⁷

In most countries in the region, national harm reduction policies are often lacking, yet guidelines exist for responses to drugs that emphasise harm reduction despite punitive drug laws. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Uruguay explicitly mention harm reduction in HIV, mental health or drug policy regulations.⁸

Harm reduction programmes run by civil society have grown throughout the region in the last two years, although they are not funded by national governments, and international funding has continued to decrease since 2022.

In most of the region's countries, with the exception of Colombia,⁹ Uruguay¹⁰ and Costa Rica, personal use and possession of drugs is still a crime.¹¹ In Costa Rica, despite the fact that personal use and possession of all drugs is decriminalised, people who use drugs continue to be stigmatised and criminalised.¹²

Adult use of cannabis is only legal in Uruguay.¹³ Colombia¹⁴ and Mexico¹⁵ attempted to legalise the adult use of cannabis, but neither bill progressed through the full legislative process.¹⁶ Chile¹⁷ and Brazil¹⁸ have ended prison sentences for personal use of cannabis, but punishment for certain circumstances has shifted to fines or compulsory rehabilitation. Even though these reforms mark progress, the use and possession of cannabis is still not effectively or fully decriminalised in either country.¹⁹

Medical use of cannabis is decriminalised in Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Uruguay,²⁰ although access varies widely. In Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela, such as in most Central American countries, there are no legal differences between medical and non-medical use.²¹

Civil society organisations are particularly concerned about the criminalisation and stigmatisation of people who use drugs and the increase of violence associated with organised crime and drug trafficking, especially in Central America,²² Mexico²³ and Ecuador.²⁴ The impact of the cocaine trade in the current prohibitionist context is visible in different parts of the region, such as Ecuador, where, in recent years, drug trafficking has resulted

in a wave of lethal violence linked to local and transnational crime groups.²⁵ In the Caribbean, in countries such as Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, the Bahamas and Haiti, violence has increased due to competition between criminal groups for drug markets.²⁶ El Salvador, however, is experiencing a gradual replacement of gang violence with state violence.²⁷ El Salvador's maximum-security jail is part of a controversial national security policy that has been accused of perpetrating human rights abuses, including detentions without proper legal procedures like arrest warrants in place.^{28,29}

The region's intricate and shifting drug policies highlight a pivotal moment where the call for comprehensive reform – anchored in harm reduction and human rights – is more critical than ever to tackle the intertwined challenges of violence, criminalisation and public health.

KEY ISSUE

STIMULANT HARM REDUCTION

Latin America and the Caribbean are characterised by a complex matrix of social inequality. Factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity and race, territory, migration status and disability contribute to multiple layers of exclusion and discrimination. The COVID-19 pandemic, socio-political crises and the regression of socio-economic policies have greatly exacerbated social gaps.^{30,31} According to the majority of the responses to the *Global State of Harm Reduction* survey from Latin American and Caribbean respondents, harm reduction is primarily being provided against a backdrop of increased unemployment, housing crises and migration.³²

Unlike in other regions, injecting drug use is not prevalent in Latin America and the Caribbean.³³ However, it is more common along Mexico's northern border with the USA, Puerto Rico and some Colombian cities, and harm reduction organisations operate needle and syringe programmes in these locations.³⁴ Drug consumption rooms can be found in Tijuana and Mexicali in Mexico and Bogotá in Colombia. They are run by civil society organisations and take a strong peer-led approach.^{a, 35}

Stimulant drug use is common in Latin America and the Caribbean.³⁶ Smoking substances like cannabis and cocaine is the most common type of drug use in the region. But the harm reduction interventions needed for this, such as safer smoking

kits, are not widely available. The drug consumption room in Tijuana, Mexico offers a space for women who smoke drugs.³⁷ The recreational use of other stimulants, like MDMA, methamphetamines³⁸ and tusi,³⁹ are increasing.⁴⁰ As a response, peer-led colorimetric drug checking managed by civil society organisations is being implemented in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Peru, Colombia and Mexico.⁴¹ The majority of these interventions operate without government regulation or support.

Although opioid use is not prevalent in the region,⁴² and fentanyl is not recorded as a substance used, except in isolated cases along the northern US-Mexico border, the issue is framed as an important problem in public discourse in Latin America. Harm reduction organisations in Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Costa Rica and Argentina agree that increased fentanyl use, such as has occurred in the USA and Canada, is not as likely in the region because the illicit use of fentanyl and other opioids is different.⁴³ In particular, they refer to the low use of heroin and other opiates, and the existence of national regulations on the legal use of fentanyl. Despite this, the 'fentanyl ghost' haunts the narrative. The media's handling of fentanyl use in Latin America lacks an evidence-base, and it has created an alarming public narrative which is empowering local governments to strengthen punitive drug policies.⁴⁴

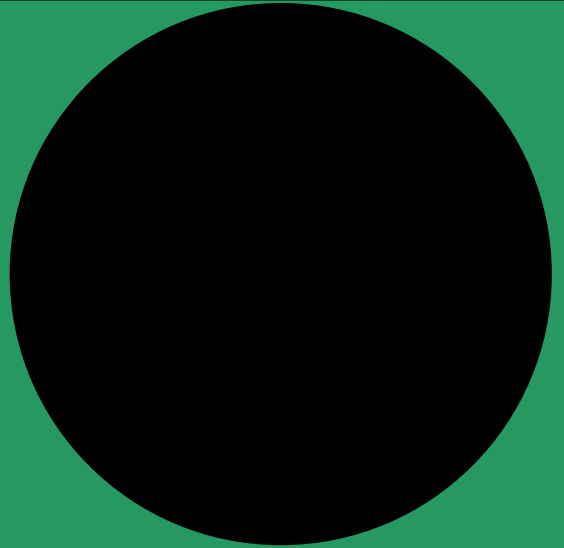
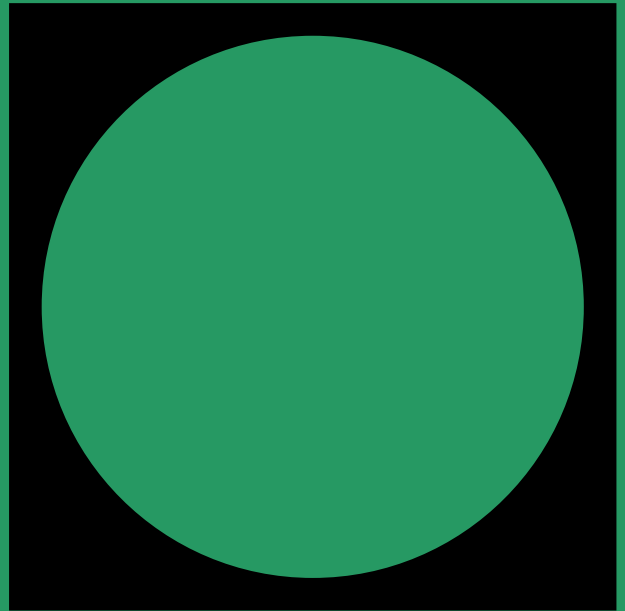
a The civil society organisations are Prevencasa in Tijuana, Verter in Mexicali and Acción Técnica Social in Bogotá.

“ Stimulant drug use is common in Latin America and the Caribbean. Smoking substances like cannabis and cocaine is the most common type of drug use in the region. But the harm reduction interventions needed for this, such as safer smoking kits, are not widely available.”

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA



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TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN ASIA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs ^a	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Afghanistan	57,207	1.41	23.08	2.77	✓ 8	✓ M	✓	×	×
Algeria	17,000	nd ^f	nd	nd	✓ 3	✓ M	nd	nd	×
Bahrain	5,100	3.89	3.89	nd	×	nd	×	×	×
Djibouti	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd	×	×	×
Egypt	96,230	3.73	nd	nd	✓	✓ M	×	×	×
Iraq	39,277	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Iran	138,250	8.3	36.8	3.04	✓	✓ M B	✓	×	×
Israel	nd	nd	nd	nd	✓	✓ M B	×	×	×
Jordan	10,488	0	nd	nd	×	✓	×	×	×
Kuwait	12,000	0.1	30.87	1.52	×	✓	×	×	×
Lebanon	9,000	0.05	23.59	1.07	✓ 1	✓ B	✓	×	×
Libya	6,677	87.1	94.2	4.5	×	×	×	×	×
Morocco	17,750	5.05	63.13	nd	✓ 3	✓ M	×	×	×
Oman	2,922	0.53	36.56	6.29	×	×	×	×	×
Pakistan	438,000	33.2	51.32	2.66	✓ ^g	×	×	×	×
Palestine	5,000	0	41.48	6.15	×	✓ M B	×	×	×
Qatar	1,827	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Saudi Arabia	3,400	2.46	62.61	7.7	×	×	×	×	×
Somalia	392	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Sudan	986	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Syria	10,000	0	3.3	0.5	×	×	×	×	×
Tunisia	11,000	3.54	28.32	4.3	✓	×	×	×	×
United Arab Emirates	6,247	nd	nd	nd	×	✓	×	×	×
Yemen	844	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone

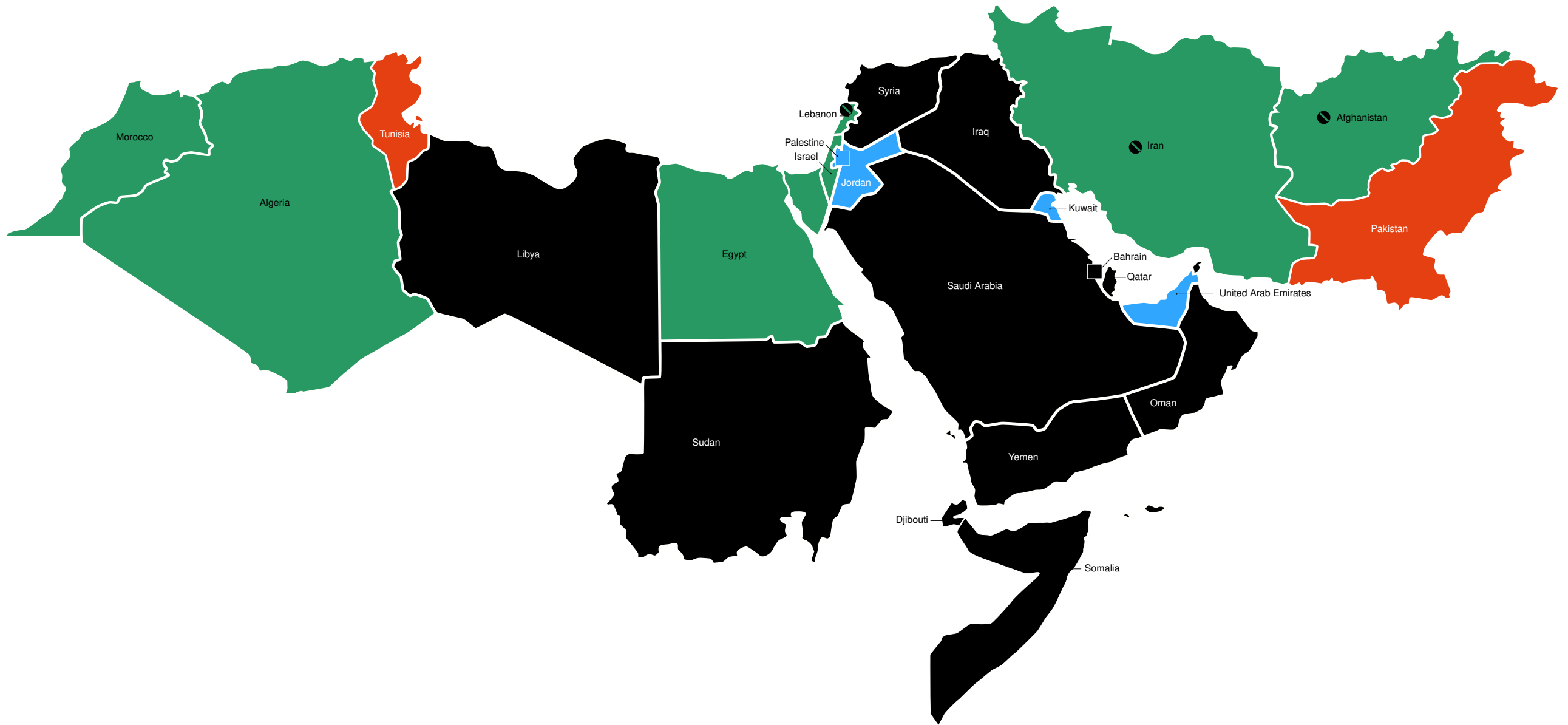
c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

g NSP in 45 district-level Continuum of Prevention and Care (CoPC+) sites and covers 62 districts through outreach.



- Both NSP and OAT available
- OAT only
- NSP only
- Neither available
- Not known
- Peer-distribution of naloxone

NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



9 countries (38%) in the Middle East and North Africa provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



11 countries (45%) in the Middle East and North Africa provide **opioid agonist therapy** (+4 from 2022, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates)



No country in the Middle East and North Africa provide **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



No country in the Middle East and North Africa provide **safer smoking kits** (no change from 2022)

KEY ISSUE

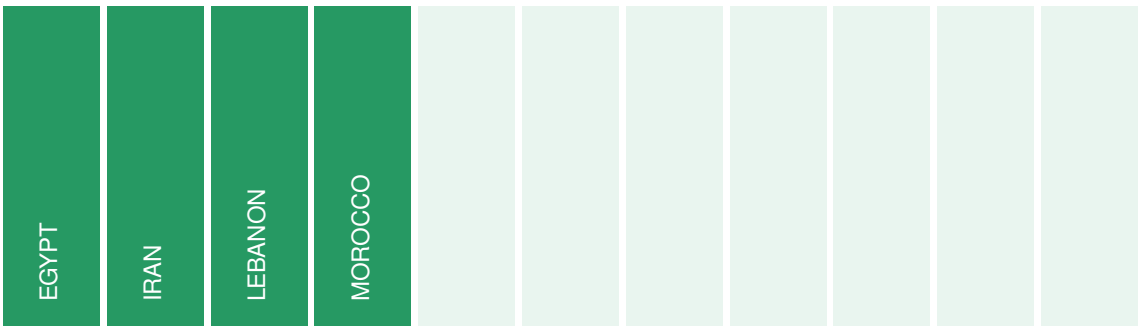
BARRIERS TO HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

Socio-cultural barriers, such as stigma, discrimination, lack of public understanding, community resistance and religious factors, hinder the availability and accessibility of health services for people who use drugs.¹ These barriers are present not only in society but also within healthcare settings, affecting services related to needle and syringe programmes (NSP), opioid agonist therapy (OAT) and HIV.² In Egypt, a 2023 study found that healthcare staff in hospitals regularly stigmatise and discriminate against people who use drugs, which directly impacts access to services.³

Religiously-framed narratives in predominantly Islamic countries further restrict access to harm reduction services.^{4,5} A systematic narrative review of studies on the experiences of people who use

drugs in Muslim communities in Iran, Afghanistan, Egypt, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates highlights the scarcity of research and data on drug use and harm reduction, stigma, and the psychosocial and organisational barriers that make it challenging for people who use drugs to access services.^{6,7} In Algeria, religious barriers prevent people from seeking NSP services because using drugs is considered a major sin.⁸ In Iran, unrealistic expectations from family and society, as well as stigma and the intertwining of treatment with ethical and religious principles, are identified as the most significant socio-cultural barriers to harm reduction and HIV treatment.⁹ In Egypt, despite the significant scale-up of harm reduction services, some healthcare providers still perceive these services as culturally and religiously unacceptable.¹⁰

Although 11 countries mention harm reduction and people who use drugs in national policy documents, only 4 have adopted supportive policies in their National HIV Strategic Plans



- countries that mention harm reduction in national policy documents
- countries that have adopted harm reduction in their National HIV Strategic Plans

Policymakers' unwillingness to prioritise and implement harm reduction measures, combined with centralised political power and 'top-down' health systems, significantly undermines harm reduction efforts. This results in poor implementation and sustainability, even when harm reduction is mentioned in national strategies.¹¹

Although 11 countries mention harm reduction and people who use drugs in national policy documents, only 4 (Egypt, Iran, Lebanon and Morocco) have adopted supportive policies in their National HIV Strategic Plan.¹² As a result, the coverage of harm reduction services remains inadequate in the region.¹³

Punitive laws which criminalise the use of drugs further hinder the implementation of harm reduction services,¹⁴ discourage people who use drugs from seeking services and increase levels of stigma and discrimination.¹⁵ Strict punitive laws that criminalise the possession or use of drugs were documented in 14 countries in the region, while data from other countries is lacking.¹⁶ In Iran, in 2023, the government executed 459 people for drug-related offences, a 79% increase from 2022 and the highest number in the country since 2015.^{17,18,19} In Lebanon, around 3,000 people are arrested each year on charges related to substance use, depriving basic rights, such as treatment, support, education and employment, for those who are sentenced.²⁰

These interlinked factors affect the resources allocated for harm reduction services, increase the stigmatisation and marginalisation of people who use drugs and discourage people who use drugs from seeking services.^{21,22} Availability, accessibility

and quality of harm reduction services, not only within communities but within prisons and other closed settings, are also impacted.^{23,24} In Morocco, for instance, although OAT is available in prisons and other closed settings, it is reported to be largely inaccessible, and NSP and condoms are entirely unavailable as prison authorities believe these measures would incentivise drug use and sexual activity.²⁵ In Egypt, women who use drugs report being denied harm reduction services and rehabilitation treatment and also report humiliating experiences while in prison.²⁶

As documented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), key informants from Punjab in Pakistan reported that none of the province's 43 prisons, including 5 women's prisons, provide HIV services.²⁷ However, Nai Zindagi, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Pakistan, offers harm reduction services in 24 prisons (23 in Sindh and 1 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Three of these are female prisons, and three are juvenile prisons. Harm reduction services provided are HIV testing, counselling on safer sex, linkages to antiretroviral treatment (ART) for HIV, adherence support, baseline investigation to initiate ART and linkages to hepatitis C treatment.

Due to budget cuts, UNAIDS was forced to close its Middle East and North Africa regional office. This has led to concerns about the continuity and sustainability of leadership and advocacy for HIV and the harm reduction response in the region.²⁸

It has also made it challenging for community organisations that work on HIV, given that 70% of HIV infections in the region are among key populations,^a and community-led NGOs provide the main frontline support for them.

a UNAIDS considers gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, transgender people, people who inject drugs, and prisoners and other incarcerated people as the five main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

“ Punitive laws which criminalise the use of drugs further hinder the implementation of harm reduction strategies, discourage people who use drugs from seeking services and increase levels of stigma and discrimination. Strict punitive laws that criminalise the possession or use of drugs were documented in 14 countries in the region, while data from other countries is lacking. ”

KEY ISSUE

BARRIERS TO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF KEY POPULATIONS

Representation and inclusion of affected communities are crucial for ensuring effective and equitable health responses. This is especially true in the Middle East and North Africa, where marginalised communities most affected by HIV are often excluded from decision-making processes.²⁹ People who use drugs face significant barriers to participating in the decision-making processes that affect them, leading to gaps in harm reduction services and policies that fail to appropriately address their needs. The barriers that prevent people who use drugs from participating in decision-making and programming relate to social and cultural factors, a lack of political will and commitment, stigma, discrimination and repressive and punitive legal frameworks.³⁰

Despite this challenging backdrop, over the past two years, representation and engagement of key populations in the region has increased.³¹ For instance, MENAROSA, a regional network established in 2010 for women living with HIV, and MENANPUD (the Middle East and North African Network for People who Use Drugs), an NGO established in 2007 to advocate for the rights of people who use drugs in the region, have participated and engaged in advocacy, campaigns, planning, research, mapping and programme implementation for people who use drugs. For the first time, in 2024, an important collaboration between the two organisations took place, with representatives developing a joint advocacy plan.^{32,33} In mid-2024, they also began coordinating the MENA Learning

Hub to focus on community engagement and learning in relation to the Global Fund's procedures and processes in the region.³⁴ The hub's first project will be to assess the learning needs of certain marginalised communities. This will focus on people living with HIV, women living with HIV, people who use drugs and people living with tuberculosis (TB) in all Global Fund eligible countries (Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen).^{35,36}

Despite the efforts of the last two years, it is still a significant challenge to include and represent people who use drugs in scaling up harm reduction services in the region.

The *Global State of Harm Reduction 2024* survey responses revealed varied involvement of people who use drugs in planning and implementation across different countries in the region for services related to NSP and OAT. In Egypt and Tunisia, NGOs reported no meaningful involvement of people who use drugs.^{37,38} In Algeria and Afghanistan, responses were mixed, with some respondents unsure about the level of involvement and others affirming meaningful participation.^{39,40,41} In Lebanon, the responses were inconsistent, with some stating involvement in planning only, implementation only, both, or none at all.⁴² This highlights the lack of clarity regarding the engagement of people who use drugs in these programmes.

Civil society organisations have conducted various situation assessments and consultations on harm reduction in the region over the past few years. These assessments and engagements underscored the urgent need to involve and engage people who use drugs in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of advocacy initiatives, service delivery and policymaking. This involvement is essential to ensure effective, person-centred efforts and accountable decision making.

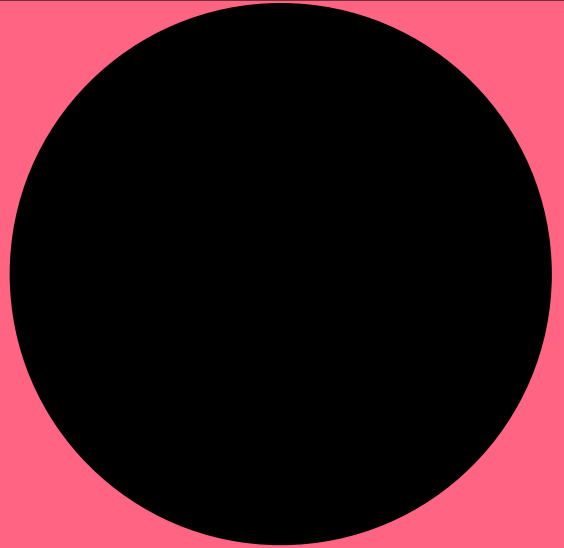
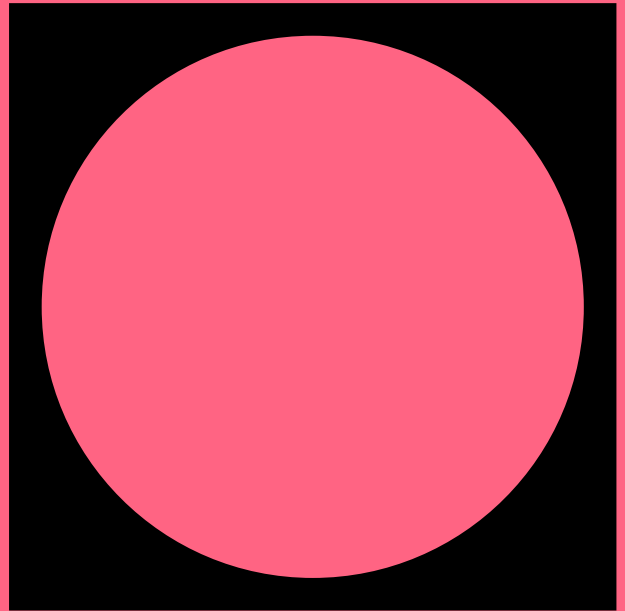
There have been several capacity building initiatives for key populations and organisations working in the harm reduction field, ensuring that all stakeholders have the essential skills and resources to meaningfully contribute to harm reduction efforts. For instance, in 2023, during a regional consultation, representatives from Libya and Yemen emphasised the need for meaningful engagement of people who use drugs in the creation of HIV National Strategic Plans and responses founded on human rights and gender equality. Representatives from Libya and Pakistan also advocated for a National Multi-Stakeholder Accountability Framework for people who use drugs to address the availability and accessibility of harm reduction services.⁴³ The need for community engagement in emergency situations was also highlighted in COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Plans for Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen in order to ensure effective and timely crisis responses.⁴⁴

The Global Fund Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) assessment on TB in Lebanon emphasised the importance of patient-centred care, community inclusion and patient rights. However, the *Lebanon National Strategic Plan to End Tuberculosis (2023-2030)* did not integrate community participation, revealing a gap in policy implementation.⁴⁵ The CRG assessment recommended promoting the involvement of people who use drugs and prioritising their unique needs so that key populations can be more effectively linked to essential TB services and support networks.

While there have been notable efforts to increase the representation and engagement of key populations, social, cultural and legal barriers continue to hinder meaningful participation, leading to gaps in harm reduction services and policymaking. Continued advocacy and targeted efforts are essential to ensure these communities are not only included in but are central to the development and execution of initiatives that directly affect their lives.

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- 6 Karbasi, A., et al., (2023), 'An Evolving HIV Epidemic in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region: A Scoping Review', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 20, no. 3844.
- 7 Al-Ghafri, Q., P. Radcliffe and G. Gilchrist, (2023), 'Barriers and facilitators to accessing inpatient and community substance use treatment and harm reduction services for people who use drugs in the Muslim communities: A systematic narrative review of studies on the experiences of people who receive services and service providers', *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, vol. 244, e109790.
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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: NORTH AMERICA



AUTHOR OF NORTH AMERICA REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **Thomas Kerr**

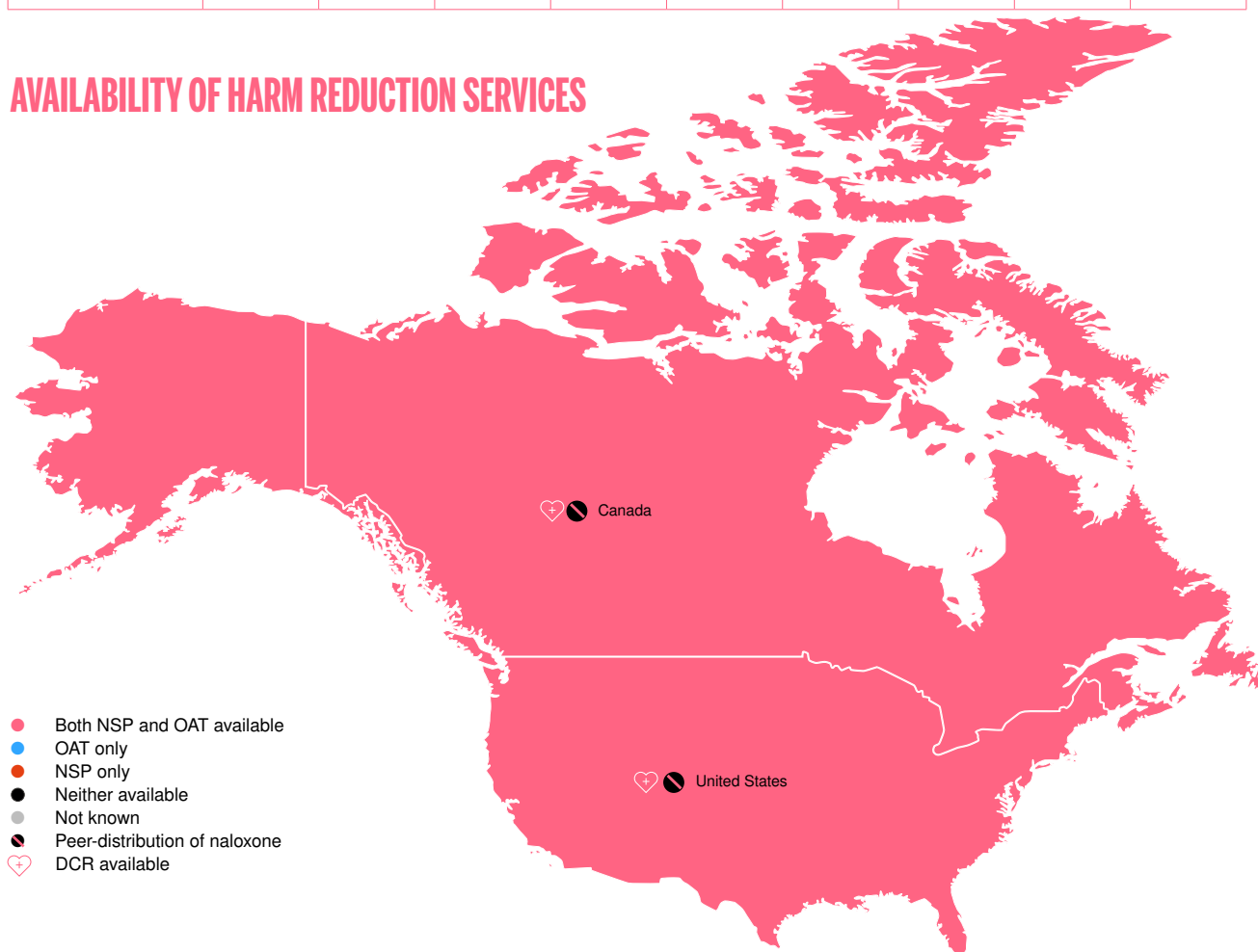


Dr. Thomas Kerr, PhD, is Head of the Division of Social Medicine in the Department of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He is also the Director of Research at the British Columbia Centre on Substance Use. Dr. Kerr has extensive research experience characterising high-risk substance use, as well as the impact of related health interventions and policy.

TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN NORTH AMERICA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Canada	174,500	10.3	64.2	nd ^f	✓	✓ M B	✓	✓ 41 ^g	✓
United States of America	3,695,400	5.9	53.5	4.8	✓	✓ M B	✓	✓ 2	✓

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES



a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone.

c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (DCR) (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

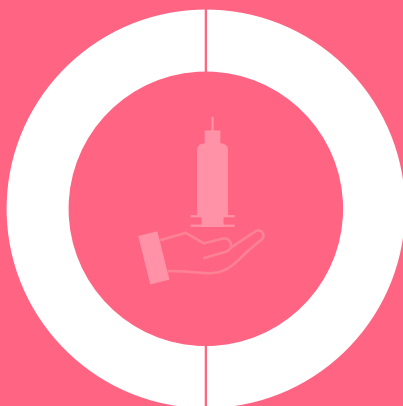
e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

g This includes one prison DCR in Drumheller, Alberta.

f nd = no data.

g This includes three DCRs in prisons.

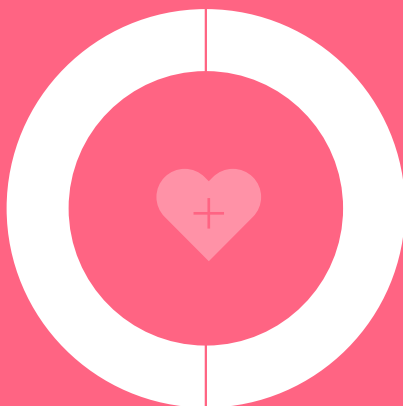
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



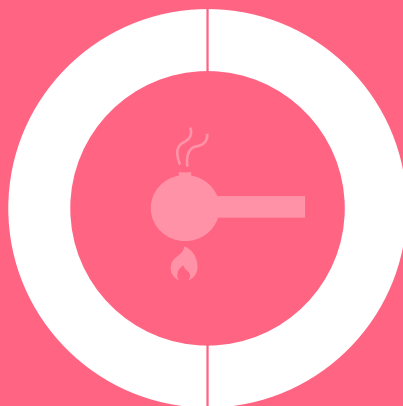
2 countries (100%) in North America provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



2 countries (100%) in North America provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)



2 countries in North America provide **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



2 countries in North America provide **safer smoking kits** (no change from 2022)

TABLE STATE-BY-STATE ACCESS TO HARM REDUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES

State	Needle and syringe programmes	Is possession of syringes criminalised by drug paraphernalia laws?	Licensed opioid treatment programmes	Licensed drug consumption rooms
Alabama	1	Yes	Yes	No
Alaska	4	No	Yes	No
Arizona	15	Yes	Yes	No
Arkansas	2	Yes	Yes	No
California	58	No	Yes	No
Colorado	13	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Connecticut	9	No	Yes	No
Delaware	1	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Florida	6	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Georgia	6	Yes	Yes	No
Hawaii	1	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Idaho	5	Yes	Yes	No
Illinois	14	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Indiana	12	Yes	Yes	No
Iowa	1	Yes	Yes	No
Kansas	0	Yes	Yes	No
Kentucky	35	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Louisiana	6	Yes	Yes	No
Maine	8	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Maryland	8	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Massachusetts	15	No	Yes	No
Michigan	23	No	Yes	No
Minnesota	13	No	Yes	No
Mississippi	0	Yes	Yes	No
Missouri	4	Yes	Yes	No
Montana	4	Yes	Yes	No
Nebraska	0	Yes	Yes	No
Nevada	2	No	Yes	No
New Hampshire	9	No	Yes	No
New Jersey	3	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
New Mexico	5	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
New York	25	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	Yes 2
North Carolina	32	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
North Dakota	5	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Ohio	20	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Oklahoma	4	Yes	Yes	No
Oregon	13	No	Yes	No

State	Needle and syringe programmes	Is possession of syringes criminalised by drug paraphernalia laws?	Licensed opioid treatment programmes	Licensed drug consumption rooms
Pennsylvania	7	Yes	Yes	No
Rhode Island	2	No	Yes	No
South Carolina	4	No	Yes	No
South Dakota	0	Yes	Yes	No
Tennessee	9	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Texas	8	Yes	Yes	No
Utah	6	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Vermont	4	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Virginia	3	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Washington	29	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
West Virginia	8	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No
Wisconsin	16	No	Yes	No
Wyoming	0	Yes	No	No
Washington DC	4	Yes, but NSP clients exempt	Yes	No

KEY ISSUE

DRUG CONSUMPTION ROOMS

Drug consumption rooms (DCRs), also known as overdose prevention centres, supervised injection sites or safe injection facilities, are spaces where individuals can consume pre-obtained drugs under the supervision of healthcare providers or other trained staff.¹ DCRs typically provide emergency overdose response, primary medical care and referrals to internal and external services, including treatment for substance dependence and housing.² DCR objectives are to reduce infectious disease transmission, reduce deaths and ill-health associated with overdose, connect people who use drugs to the services they need and reduce risks associated with the consumption of drugs in public spaces.^{3,4}

Insite, the first DCR in North America, opened in 2003 in Vancouver, Canada.⁴ This DCR was subjected to rigorous evaluation; over 40 peer-reviewed studies indicated that

Insite was successful in meeting its objectives and was associated with declines in overdose deaths, infectious disease transmissions and risks associated with the consumption of drugs in public, and increased uptake of substance use treatment.^{5,6}

The success of Insite prompted the establishment of DCRs throughout Canada. Now, 39 federally sanctioned DCRs operate in five provinces.⁷ DCRs operate as stand-alone facilities, integrated within other facilities, or as mobile sites such as vans.⁸

In response to the worsening overdose crisis in Canada, around 50 'urgent public health needs sites' or overdose prevention centres have been opened.^{9,10} These are often temporary facilities, which makes numbers difficult to track. They also tend to be simpler in operation and design than conventional DCRs and have a primary focus on overdose prevention and response.⁵ The expansion of DCRs in Canada has generated some backlash. The province of Ontario recently announced a ban on DCRs within 200 feet of schools and childcare centres, which may result in the closure of 10 DCRs by 31 March 2025.¹¹

The USA has been slow to adopt DCRs despite over a decade of advocacy efforts focused on their establishment, as well as the operation of unsanctioned DCRs in some places.¹² Two locally sanctioned DCRs currently operate in New York City, and another two are scheduled to open in Rhode Island and Vermont as both states have enacted authorising legislation and allocated state funding to support their operations.^{13,14} Minnesota has also enacted legislation allocating funding for establishing and operating DCRs.¹⁵ A DCR also operated in San Francisco in 2022 with city approval, which reversed 333 overdoses during its existence. However, it was closed after one year for vague political reasons.¹⁶

The DCRs in New York were opened by OnPoint NYC in November 2021.¹⁷ Both DCRs operate within a Harm Reduction Wellness Hub which provides a range of wrap-around services under a single roof.¹⁸ In addition to the DCR, services at the hub include syringe services, drug checking, clinical care, mental health services, case management, food and nutrition and peer support.¹⁹

The OnPoint DCRs include booths and tables for injecting (eight spaces per site), as well as enclosed, communal, ventilated rooms for inhaling/smoking.²⁰ As of July 2024, 5,330 people have used the DCRs, engaging in around 149,700 drug consumption episodes, and OnPoint staff successfully intervened in 1,570 overdoses.²¹ One in five people who have used an OnPoint DCR were referred to housing, detox, treatment, primary care or an employment opportunity.²² Initial evidence from the evaluation of the New York City sites indicates that establishing the DCRs did not result in increased disorder or crime.²³

Plans to establish DCRs in other US cities have not been realised, typically as a result of political or legal barriers.^{24,25} The federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act prohibits operating spaces 'for the purpose of...using a controlled substance'^{26,27} and was recently used by the Department of Justice to prevent the opening of a DCR in Philadelphia.²⁸ Efforts to open other DCRs have also been met with considerable political opposition in some regions, while jurisdictions like Rhode Island, Vermont and Minnesota continue to move forward.^{29,30}

The evidence concerning the effectiveness of DCRs has grown substantially in recent years. There are now three peer-reviewed systematic reviews of the evidence specific to DCRs.^{31,32,33} These reviews all reach the conclusion that DCRs are effective in meeting their objectives, and do not produce feared consequences, such as enabling further drug use, undermining treatment efforts or exacerbating crime.^{34,35,36} Importantly, no one has ever died of an overdose in a DCR anywhere, and peer-reviewed research indicates that the establishment of DCRs is associated with declines in overdose deaths within neighbourhoods,^{37,38} and all-cause deaths.³⁹ Available evidence also indicates that, if people can access a DCR they are more likely to enter into detoxification and drug dependency treatment programmes^{40,41} and cease injecting drug use.⁴² Given that consuming drugs in DCRs is clearly safer than consuming drugs in other spaces, it has been deemed unethical for studies to randomize individuals to DCR access or no DCR access.^{43,44} This has resulted in never-ending questions

regarding the research specific to DCRs,⁴⁵ despite an accumulation of high quality and consistent observational evidence, including data derived from longitudinal cohort studies and studies relying on administrative data (e.g., treatment admissions, police-collected crime statistics).^{46,47,48}

The evidence concerning the effectiveness of DCRs continues to grow.¹ Although several studies indicate that these services do not exacerbate crime or drug dependency,^{49,50,51} they continue to be politicised and misrepresented by a range of stakeholders.⁵² This has constrained their implementation in some settings.^{53,54} But the way forward is clear: DCRs meet their objectives without causing negative consequences, and they have high potential to contribute to preventing people from overdosing across the world. And as the following section shows, widespread DCRs are urgently needed across the region to help prevent increasing overdose deaths.

“ In many settings, crime, people experiencing homelessness and a lack of affordable housing is being attributed to the existence of harm reduction programmes, despite a lack of evidence to demonstrate such relationships.”

KEY ISSUE

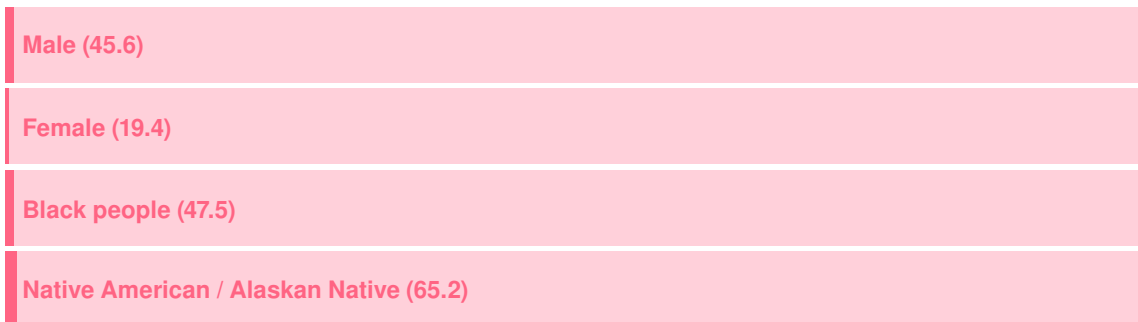
DRUG OVERDOSES

North America is contending with a public health crisis driven by accidental drug-related overdose deaths which has only worsened in recent years. A range of interventions and policies designed to prevent overdose deaths have been implemented, but they remain limited in terms of scale and coverage. At the same time, punitive approaches to drug use have continued to dominate in many settings. The epidemiology of overdose in North America is highly gendered and is having a disproportionate impact among certain racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as people of Indigenous, Native and Indian ancestry.

In the USA, according to the US Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 107,941 people died from a drug overdose in 2022 (32.6 per 100,000 people).⁵⁵ This represents a greater than 600% increase from 2000, when 16,849 people died from overdose (6.1 per 100,000).⁵⁶ Similar dynamics are evident in Canada, where 11,528 deaths occurred in 2023 (34.8 per 100,000 people).⁵⁷ This represents a greater than 500% increase since 2018, when 2,297 deaths occurred (7.8 per 100,000).⁵⁸

Males in North America continue to die of overdose at higher rates than females. In the USA, the rate of overdose death in 2022 was 45.6 per 100,000 for males and 19.4 per 100,000 for females.⁵⁹ In Canada, males accounted for 72% of those who died of an overdose in 2023.⁶⁰ In the USA, Black and Indigenous people have experienced the highest rates of death due to overdose of any racial or ethnic group (47.5 deaths per 100,000 among Black people, and 65.2 deaths per 100,000 among Native American/Alaskan Native people),⁶¹ while people of Indigenous ancestry in Canada are also disproportionately affected.⁶²

The factors driving the current overdose crisis are similar in the USA and Canada. Both countries have witnessed a large and growing increase in the presence of illegally manufactured synthetic drugs, as well as the rising co-use of stimulants and opioids.^{63,64,65} For example, while synthetic opioids such as fentanyl were involved in only 9% of overdose deaths in 2014 in the USA, this increased to 68% in 2022. Likewise, in Canada in 2023, 82% of all overdose deaths involved fentanyl or related

Overdose death rate per 100,000 people (USA)

analogues, while only 44% did in 2016.^{66,67} More recently, other synthetics, including xylazine and synthetic benzodiazepines, have entered the drug supply and complicated overdose risk and response and the delivery of harm reduction services.^{68,69,70} Aside from the growing contamination and toxicity of the drug supply, other factors continue to drive overdose deaths, including various social and economic conditions such as poverty and economic disadvantage, structural racism, pain, drug market policing, unstable housing and people experiencing homelessness.^{71,72,73,74,75,76}

In the USA, the Department of Health and Human Services' *Overdose Prevention Strategy* seeks to address four core areas: prevention, evidence-based treatment, harm reduction and recovery.⁷⁷ Spanning the areas of treatment and harm reduction, medications for opioid agonist therapy (OAT), such as methadone and buprenorphine, remain primary approaches. While in some settings OAT is more widely available,⁷⁸ access is more restricted in other areas.⁷⁹ Barriers to OAT persist, with factors such as distance, stigma, insurance and restrictive programme delivery practices constraining access and retention.⁸⁰ Naloxone distribution appears to have increased in the USA, although coverage is generally regarded as inadequate.^{81,82} However, stigma and financial constraints still act as barriers to access in some settings.⁸³ Recently, as discussed above, two DCRs opened in the USA and two more are set to open, but this form of intervention remains controversial, and attempts to open such services in some states have been denied.^{84,85,86,87} There have also been significant increases in the availability of drug checking services in the USA, although their impact remains unclear.⁸⁸

Canada's national Drugs and Substances Strategy seeks to balance prevention and education, evidence, substance use services and supports and substance controls (i.e., drug laws, enforcement). Substance use services span harm reduction, recovery and treatment programmes.⁸⁹ A variety of harm reduction programmes exist in Canada, including needle and syringe programmes,

naloxone provision, drug checking, DCRs and safer supply.^{90,91,92}

Safer supply involves providing prescribed medications to people who are at high risk of overdose as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply⁹³

including by providing medications such as hydromorphone, fentanyl powder and patches, dexedrin and clonazepam. Safer supply programmes have been the subject of much controversy, including concerns about diversion.⁹⁴ However, a growing body of evidence indicates that safer supply programmes reduce overdose risk and healthcare costs, and help people reduce their reliance on an unregulated and contaminated drug supply.^{95,96,97}

Throughout North America, there are growing concerns regarding the politicisation of the overdose crisis and backlash against harm reduction policies and interventions in particular.^{98,99,100} The government of Ontario's decision to close several DCRs is a prime example of this.¹⁰¹ In the USA, another example can be seen in the rolling back of Oregon's drug decriminalisation laws.^{102,103} In many settings, crime, people experiencing homelessness and a lack of affordable housing is being attributed to the existence of harm reduction programmes, despite a lack of evidence to demonstrate such relationships.¹⁰⁴

There are also growing concerns about inaction by governments and a lack of funding needed to address the current crisis.¹⁰⁵ Given the ever-worsening epidemic of overdose death in North America, greater investment and action is needed to ensure access to evidence-based harm reduction programmes reach the people most at risk of overdosing. This should include novel interventions that address the rapidly evolving toxic drug supply and approaches designed to address the intersections of overdose with gender, race and Indigenous ancestry.

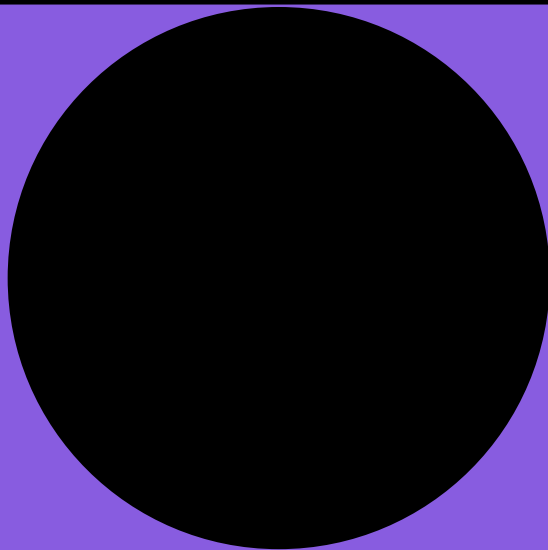
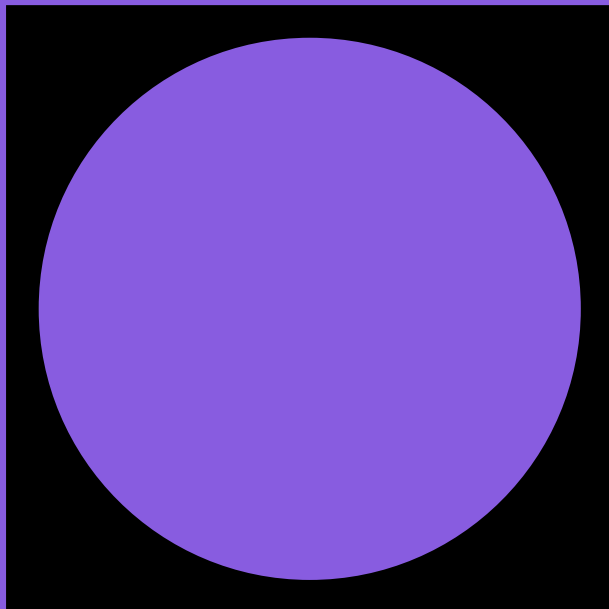
a Diversion is the non-intended or non-medical use of a prescribed medication, or its use by any individual other than the person for whom it was prescribed.

“ Aside from the growing contamination and toxicity of the drug supply, other factors continue to drive overdose deaths, including various social and economic conditions such as poverty and economic disadvantage, structural racism, pain, drug market policing, unstable housing and people experiencing homelessness.”

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: OCEANIA



AUTHOR OF OCEANIA REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **John Gobeil**



John Gobeil is the CEO of the Australian Injecting and Illicit Drug Users League (AVIL), the national peak organisation focused on advancing the health and human rights of people with living or lived experience of drug use. They have worked in several frontline and leadership roles for renowned community-led organisations through the years, as well as many local drop-in centres, successfully improving programming and service delivery for the community, building organisational capacity and increasing sustainability. John draws from personal lived and living experience of discrimination, marginalisation and stigma as a neurodivergent LGBTQI+, people who use drugs peer and CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse person) migrant.

TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN OCEANIA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Aotearoa New Zealand	nd ^f	0.1	53	2.8	✓ 227	✓ M B N	✓	✗	✗
Australia	98,500 ^g	2.1	32	2.2	✓ 4442	✓ M B N	✓	✓ 2	✗
Federated States of Micronesia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Fiji	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Kiribati	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Marshall Islands	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Nauru	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Palau	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Papua New Guinea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Samoa	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Solomon Islands	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Timor Leste	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Tonga	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Tuvalu	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Vanuatu	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone.

c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

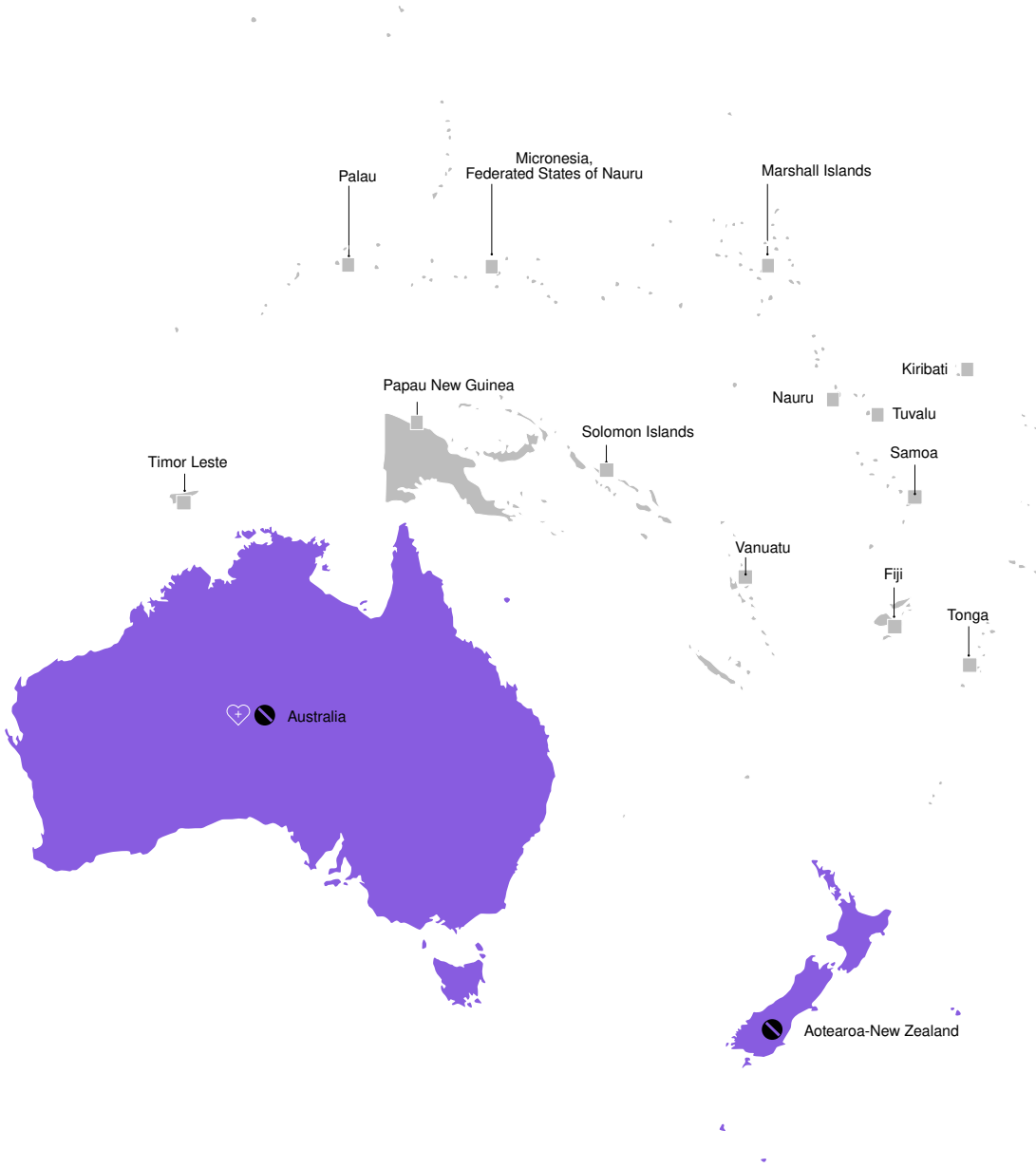
d At least one drug consumption room (DCR) (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

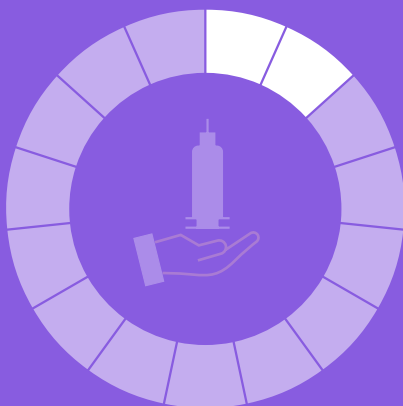
g Civil society actors believe this to be an underestimate.

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

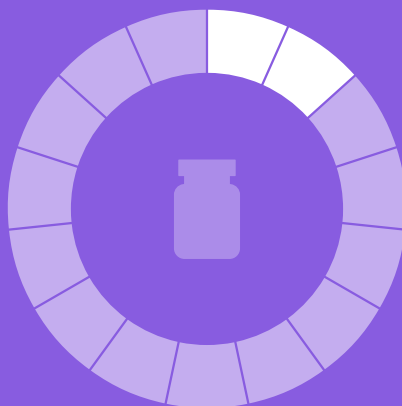


- Both NSP and OAT available
- OAT only
- NSP only
- Neither available
- Not known
- Peer-distribution of naloxone
- DCR available

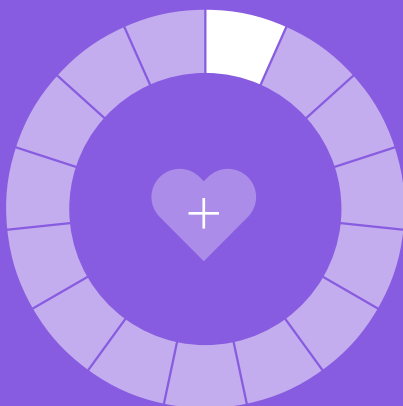
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



2 countries (13.33%) in Oceania provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



2 countries (13.33%) in Oceania provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)



1 country in Oceania provides **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



There is no country in Oceania that provides **safer smoking kits**

KEY ISSUE

DIVERSE LANDSCAPE, CONSISTENT CRIMINALISATION

The Oceania region comprises a combination of high- and low-income countries such as Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.

Although many countries in the region are small, each country has unique cultural, linguistic, political and social landscapes, alongside differing histories, locations and economic development,^{1,2} which impact the availability and use of drugs in each context. However, all countries in Oceania criminalise and stigmatise people who use drugs.

Countries in the region show variable commitments to harm reduction. Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are recognised for pioneering the implementation of harm reduction and HIV prevention services for people who use drugs. There is a relatively good understanding of the ways drugs are used in both countries, and national needle and syringe programmes (NSP) have been implemented in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand since 1986 and 1988, respectively.^{3,4}

Far less is known about drug use in many other Oceania countries. In the last decade, the increase in drug trafficking routes between Asia and the Americas to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in an increase in drug seizures, including cocaine, ketamine and methamphetamine, and the availability and use of these drugs in countries

such as Papua New Guinea and Fiji.^{5,6} However, information and data relating to patterns of drug use and the availability of harm reduction in these countries is limited, and there is little demonstrated commitment to implementing health, human rights and harm reduction policies and services for people who use drugs.⁷

While Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand are recognised as harm reduction leaders, no country in the region has legalised or decriminalised drug use entirely. The only place in Oceania where some decriminalisation has happened is the Australian Capital Territory, which decriminalised small amounts of drugs for personal use in October 2023.^{a,8}

Due in part to consistent criminalisation, social and systemic stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs is rampant.⁹ People who use drugs continue to be harmed by laws and regulations, and even the agencies that are designed to protect them.^{10,11} This inequitable treatment has prevented policymakers and governments across the region from prioritising and developing lifesaving harm reduction interventions, especially those that are peer-led.^{12,13}

Even in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, investment and support for harm reduction is declining.

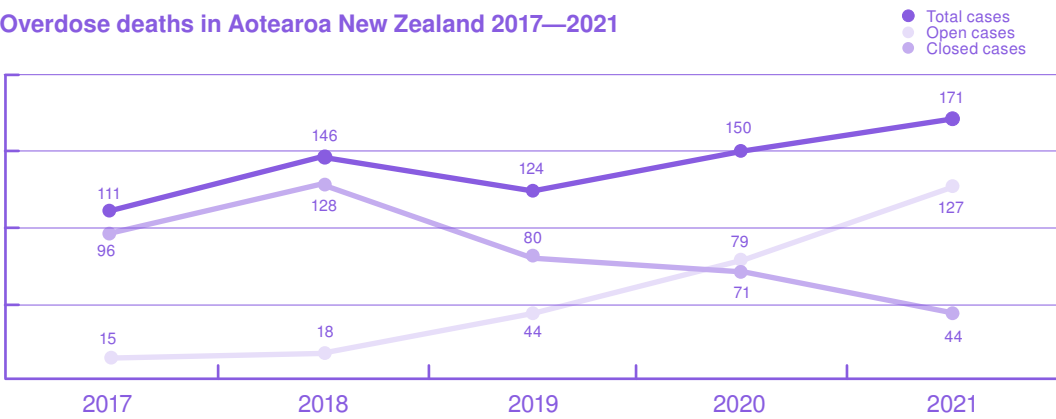
^a Amounts that are decriminalised for use are limited to 1.5g of methamphetamine, 1.5g of MDMA, 1.5g of cocaine, 1g of heroin, 1.5g of psilocybin (dry or wet), 0.001g of LSD, 50g of dried cannabis and 150g of wet cannabis.

In Australia, funding for harm reduction has decreased over time compared to funding to address drug supply and demand reduction.¹⁴

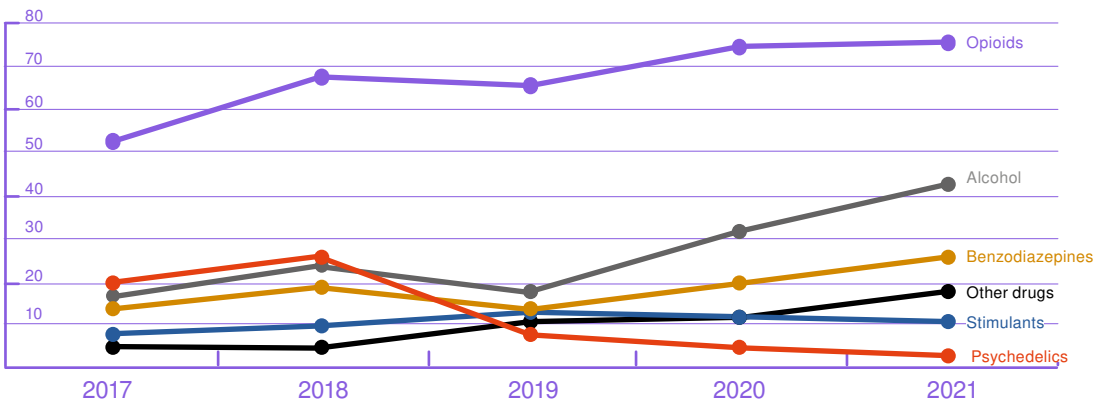
In Aotearoa New Zealand, the national NSP, which was set up in 1988, was defunded in 2023.¹⁵ In both countries, drug-related overdoses increase each year, and more people than ever are dying every day from overdoses.¹⁶ In Aotearoa New Zealand, the most recent coronial data identified 702 overdose deaths between 2017 and 2021.

Across this five-year period, cases rose by 54%. In comparison, the population of people who use drugs increased by just 6%.^{17,18} Recent data from Australia also shows an alarming increase in the number of drug-related deaths, with 2,356 deaths reported in 2022; 79 more than in 2021.^{19,20} The impacts of criminalisation, aggressive law enforcement and related stigmatisation prevents people who use drugs from accessing essential services and seeking help, resulting in preventable illnesses and deaths, while drug laws, regulations and the lack of resources hinder the delivery of crucial peer-based harm reduction services and support.^{21,22}

Overdose deaths in Aotearoa New Zealand 2017—2021



Overdose deaths in Aotearoa New Zealand by substance 2017—2021



“ Due in part to consistent criminalisation, social and systemic stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs is rampant. People who use drugs continue to be harmed by laws and regulations, and even the agencies that are designed to protect them. This inequitable treatment has prevented policymakers and governments across the region from prioritising and developing lifesaving harm reduction interventions, especially peer-led harm reduction.”

KEY ISSUE

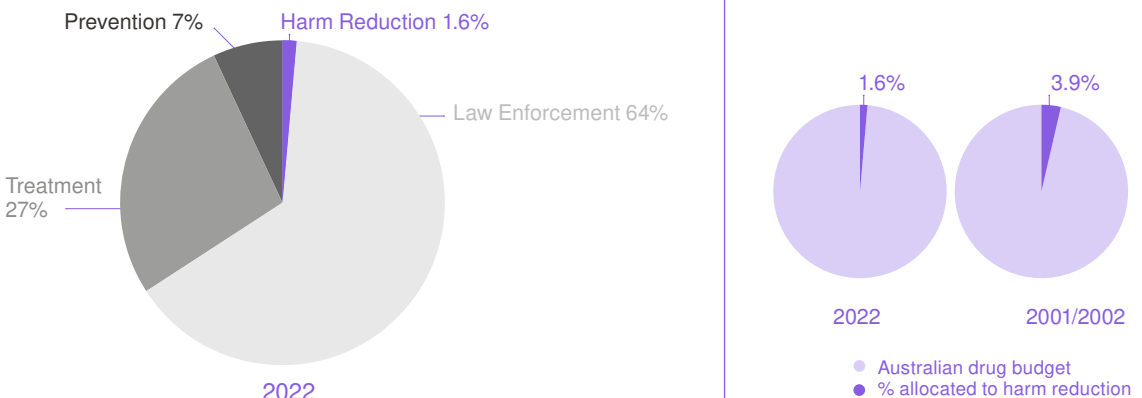
INSUFFICIENT INVESTMENT IN AND SUPPORT FOR HARM REDUCTION

Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia have multiple harm reduction programmes,^{23,24,25} including festival-based harm reduction, take-home naloxone and peer distribution, NSPs, OAT, drug checking, medically supervised injecting centres (two in Australia only) and peer-led drug user organisations.^{26,27} In Australia, between 2022 and 2024, dispensing fees for opioid agonist therapy (OAT) have finally been funded by the Commonwealth Government to uphold equitable access to OAT and human rights.^{28,29} The Queensland government in Australia implemented its first permanent drug checking fixed site and successfully trialled its first multi-day festival drug checking service.^{30,31} The New South Wales government implemented its first drug checking service at the Sydney Medically Supervised Injecting Centre.³² The Victorian government made the Melbourne Medically Supervised Injecting Room

permanent,³³ and also announced it would run a drug checking trial with mobile and fixed sites.³⁴ These changes mean Australia is slowly aligning with Aotearoa New Zealand which legalised drug checking in 2020 and made it permanent under a 2021 law.

But while the governments of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand fund a range of harm reduction services, including peer-based harm reduction responses, investment remains insufficient. This is despite over 30 years of proven efficacy, impact and cost-effectiveness of these services.³⁵ A recent report revealed that only 1.6% of the total Australian ‘drug budget’ for 2021/22 was spent on harm reduction while 64.3% was spent on law enforcement for drug control, 27.4% on treatment and 6.7% on drug use.³⁶

Australia’s drug budget



Beyond Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, other countries in Oceania have either very limited or no harm reduction programmes, and peer-based harm reduction services are unavailable.

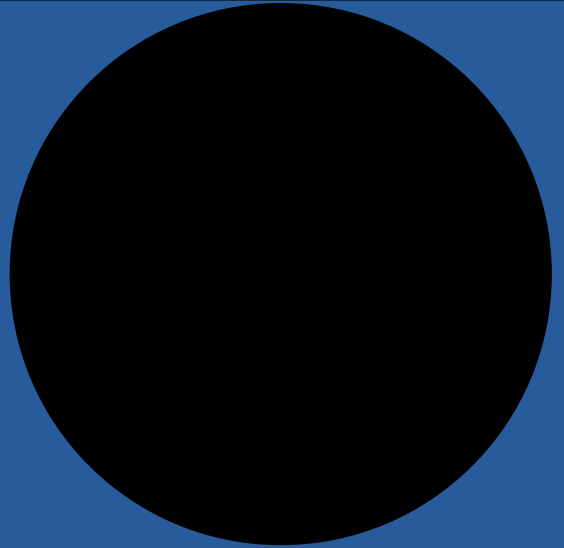
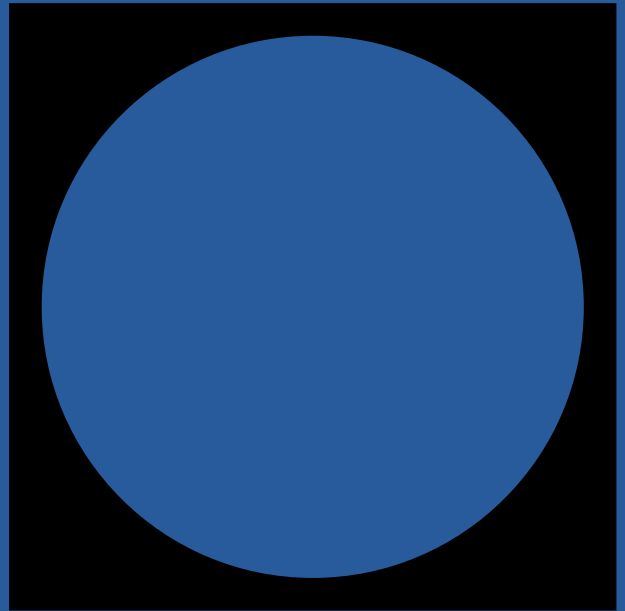
For some low-income countries in the region, expanding drug trafficking routes^{37,38} has increased the use of stimulants, including injection use, which has heightened the risk of HIV³⁹ and hepatitis C⁴⁰ infection among people who use drugs. The lack of comprehensive harm reduction programmes

means that some countries are vulnerable to HIV and hepatitis C epidemics. Most communities in the region are affected by low resourcing, lack of health infrastructure and limited community experience of blood-borne virus and harm reduction programmes, peer support and education.

There remains a need to develop and expand harm reduction programmes in the region to provide adequate coverage to support the diverse community of people who use drugs and effectively ensure community-led monitoring of services.^{41,42,43} There is an urgent need for dedicated funding to ensure that harm reduction programmes are available and accessible in all countries and territories in Oceania.

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA





Aniedi Akpan is a drug user community advocate with lived experience of drug use. He is the Chairperson of the Drug Harm Reduction Advocacy Network Nigeria (DHRAN), Team Lead of Drug Free and Preventive Healthcare organisation and a member of the Global Fund Communities Delegations representing the Key Populations constituency. He also serves as a member of the National Technical Working Group for Drug Demand Reduction and Harm Reduction at the Federal Ministry of Health where he is an active voice in advocating for harm reduction programmes for people who use drugs.



Prince Bull Luseni is the Executive Director of the West Africa Drug Policy Network (WADPN). Prince is also the President and Founder of the Institute for Drug Control and Human Security (IDCHS), a Sierra Leone based not-for-profit civil society organisation which promotes evidence-based advocacy for drug law reform.

TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Benin	800	2.1	nd ^f	nd	✓ 1	✓ M	×	×	×
Burkina Faso	90	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Burundi	nd	10.2	5.5	9.4	✓ 4	✓ M	×	×	×
Cameroon	3,500	nd	nd	nd	×	×	×	×	×
Cape Verde	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Central African Republic	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Chad	700	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Congo	2,500	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Côte d'Ivoire	2,600	3.4	1.8	10.5	✓ 3	✓	×	×	×
Democratic Republic of the Congo	168,000	3.9	nd	nd	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd
Equatorial Guinea	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Gabon	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Gambia	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Ghana	20,000	2.7	2.3	nd	✓ 1	nd	nd	nd	nd
Guinea	600	nd	nd	nd	✓	nd	nd	nd	nd
Guinea-Bissau	3,500	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Liberia	4,100	3.9	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Mali	5,600	nd	nd	nd	✓ 6	×	nd	nd	nd
Mauritania	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd	nd	nd	nd
Niger	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd	nd	nd	nd
Nigeria	177,500	10.9	5.8	6.7	✓ 7	×	nd	nd	nd
Sao Tome and Principe	nd	nd	nd	nd	×	nd	nd	nd	nd
Senegal	1,000	3.7	39.3	nd	✓	✓	nd	nd	nd
Sierra Leone	7,600	4.2	nd	nd	✓ 1	✓ S	nd	✓ 1	nd
Togo	2,700	3.4	nd	nd	×	×	nd	nd	nd

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone, S=Suboxone

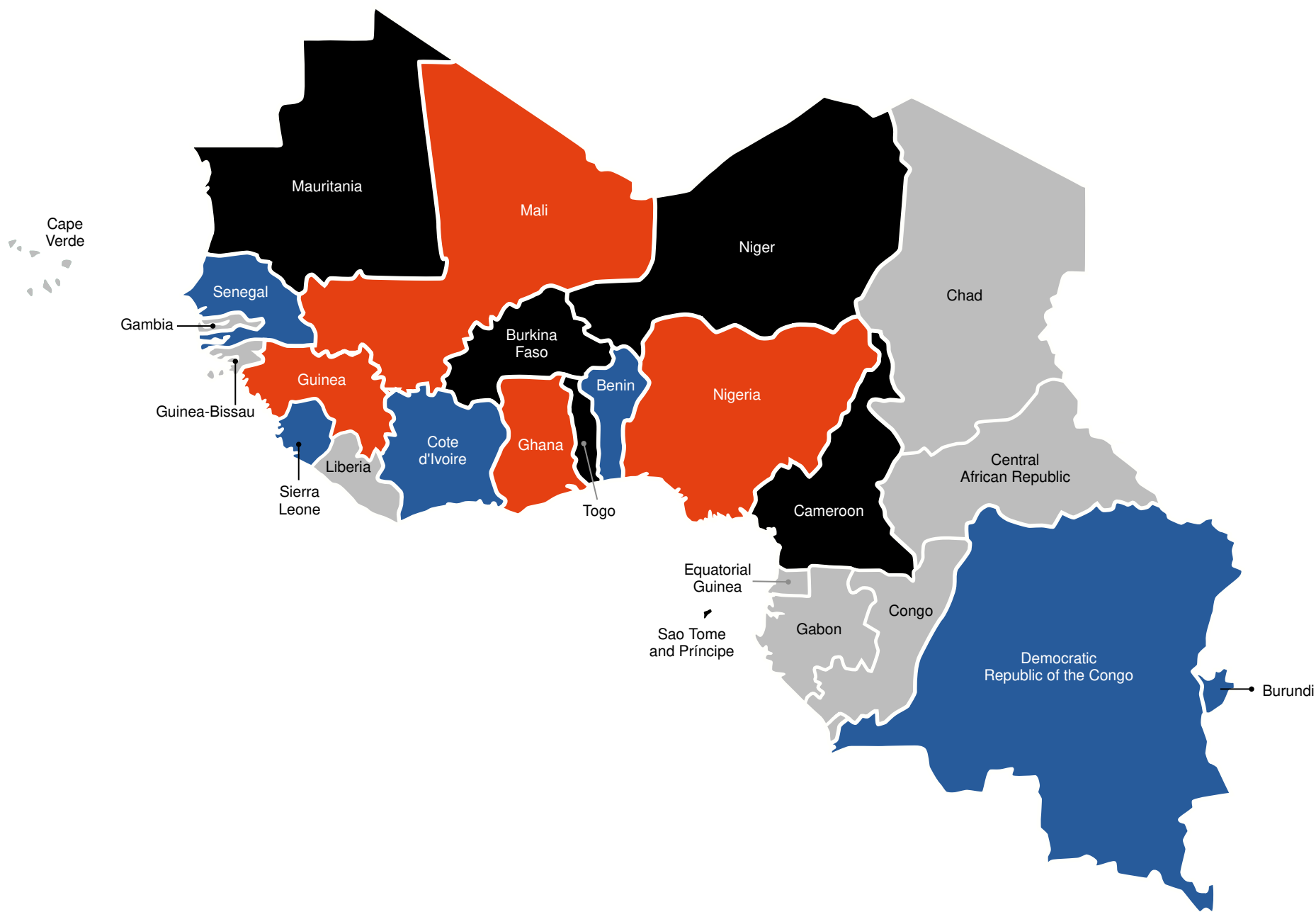
c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

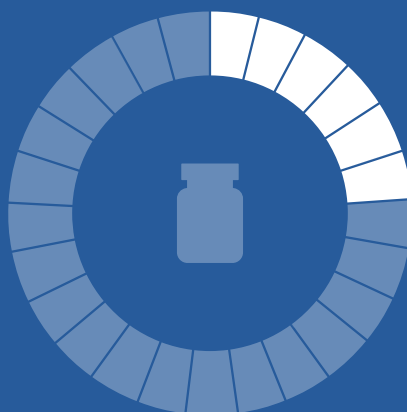


- Both NSP and OAT available
- OAT only
- NSP only
- Neither available
- Not known
- Peer-distribution of naloxone

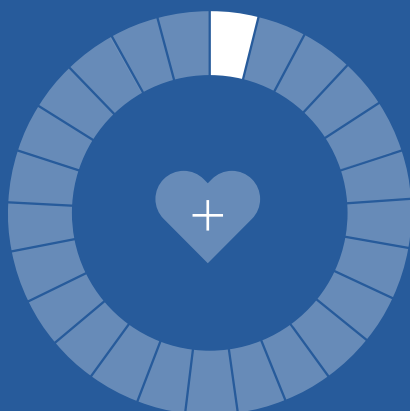
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



10 countries (25%) in West and Central Africa provide **needle and syringe programmes** (+1 from 2022, Ghana)



6 countries (20%) in West and Central Africa provide **opioid agonist therapy** (+1 from 2022, Benin)



1 country in West and Central Africa provides **drug consumption rooms** (+ Sierra Leone from 2022)



There is no country in West and Central Africa that provides **safer smoking kits**

KEY ISSUE

INADEQUATE COVERAGE OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES

Out of the 25 countries¹ that make up West and Central Africa,² 10 offer needle and syringe programmes (NSP): Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Six countries provide opioid agonist therapy (OAT): Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Benin and Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone also offers take-home naloxone, peer distribution of naloxone, and has one drug consumption room (DCR), and Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone both provide safer smoking kits.

Since 2022, some countries in the region have reported an increase in the number of people who inject drugs, including Côte d'Ivoire (82% to 2,100 people),³ Sierra Leone (74% to 5,600 people)⁴ and Nigeria (60% to 268,500 people)⁵.

Although Côte d'Ivoire offers two critical harm reduction services – NSP and OAT – a large proportion of people who inject drugs in the country do not have access to these services.⁶ Among all the countries that offer NSPs, Nigeria has made great efforts to expand its interventions to other locations.^{a7} However, this implementation has not been without challenges, as is the case for other countries, including Sierra Leone,⁸ Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.⁹

Major and persistent challenges that hinder healthcare for people who use drugs include the criminalisation of people who use drugs and the stigmatisation of drug use, the preference for law enforcement for drug control over harm reduction, the lack of adequate training and support for peer workers, exclusionary attitudes and policies and the failure to ground interventions in the lived experiences of people who use drugs.¹⁰

Peer-delivered health services play a crucial role in bridging the gap between people and the health system, particularly for those from marginalised and under-represented communities.¹¹

Globally, peer-delivered harm reduction services were introduced by some countries as far back as the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis among people who inject drugs. With the right training, peer workers can engage in diverse harm reduction activities, including outreach, risk-reduction education, policy advocacy and community-based research. There is hardly any data in the region to show that peers have received specialised training and certification to provide such support and assistance.

a NSP has been scaled up from the initial 3 pilot states to 10 (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Federal Capital Territory, Gombe, Kano, Lagos, Oyo, Plateau and Rivers). The number of people who inject drugs enrolled has increased from 2,731 to 70,738.

There is a lack of naloxone peer distribution in most countries in West and Central Africa

Peer networks in Sierra Leone and Senegal distributed injecting equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling vital NSPs to continue.¹² In Burkina Faso, a country without a harm reduction programme, civil society organisations have made significant strides in peer involvement for people who use drugs, primarily through peer-led dissemination of information about risks and law reform and the development of specific services relating to community needs.¹³ But there remains a huge gap in engaging people who use drugs as peer workers in the region, particularly when it comes to harm reduction.¹⁴

Another major challenge is the lack of services that seek to address the specific needs of women who inject drugs,¹⁵ including the provision of sexual and reproductive health services.¹⁶ Women who inject drugs face more serious consequences from co-infection such as HIV, hepatitis C (HCV) and hepatitis B (HBV) and other sexually transmitted infections compared to their male counterparts. Services also do not respond to the intersectionalities that women who use drugs experience.¹⁷ Due to the punitive legal framework in the region, women who use drugs are usually separated from their children and tend to avoid healthcare, including giving birth at facilities, to avoid punishment. While services such as psychosocial support and legal assistance may be available to other marginalised women, they rarely target or are adapted to the needs of women who use drugs.¹⁸ Investment in holistic harm reduction programmes with specific gender-sensitive services and interventions to meet the needs of women who use and inject drugs are needed. Such programmes must consider creating safe spaces where women feel secure and respected, free from judgement or discrimination. Involving female peers in the programmes is an effective way to foster trust and encourage participation.

The region's lack of adequate harm reduction interventions poses challenges to the health and wellbeing of people who use drugs. Drug use trends in the region have shifted from domestically sourced cannabis to substances such as cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine,¹⁹ and there is a 1.3% prevalence of pharmaceutical opioid use. Drug mixtures, such as kush, khadafi and monkey tail, are emerging as regional public health threats.²⁰ In countries like Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone,²¹ kush is impacting the lives and health of young people.²²

Due to the lack of adequate life-saving harm reduction interventions to prevent overdose deaths, countries are ill-prepared to tackle any increases in opioid use or a toxic drug supply that may emerge. For instance, while there is no official mortality data in Sierra Leone for overdose deaths relating to kush, one doctor told the BBC that “in recent months” hundreds of young men in the capital, Freetown have died from organ failure caused by kush.²³ In Nigeria, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency announced in November 2022 that it had uncovered plans for fentanyl to be introduced into the country's illicit drugs market.²⁴ Given Nigeria's growing population and strained healthcare infrastructure, coupled with the lack of adequate overdose intervention programmes, there are concerns that the country could be particularly vulnerable if fentanyl becomes more common in the market.²⁵

Despite the increasing number of people who inject drugs, and the high prevalence rates of HIV, HBV and HBC among this population, harm reduction interventions such as NSP, OAT and take-home naloxone remain inadequate, even in countries where these interventions are provided. This is largely due to punitive drug control laws, limited funding²⁶ and the false perception among policymakers and the public that harm reduction encourages drug use,²⁷ for which there is no evidence. More governments in the region must consider adopting legislation that is explicitly supportive of harm reduction and provide the resources to implement a full range of services.

^b UNAIDS considers gay men and other men who have sex with men, sex workers, trans and gender diverse people, people who inject drugs, and prisoners and other incarcerated people as the five main key population groups that are particularly vulnerable to HIV and frequently lack adequate access to services.

Encouragingly, Ghana and Liberia are already taking this direction. This is in large part due to the West Africa Drug Policy Network (WADPN) and its partners, which spearheaded advocacy efforts in the region for human rights and public health-focused drug policies, leading Ghana²⁸ and Liberia²⁹ to enact laws explicitly supporting harm reduction. These laws mandated the establishment of a trust fund, with a specific portion dedicated to the financing of harm reduction programmes.

“Investment in holistic harm reduction programmes with specific gender-sensitive services and interventions to meet the needs of women who use and inject drugs are needed. Such programmes must consider creating safe spaces where women feel secure and respected, free from judgement or discrimination. Involving female peers in the programmes can be an effective way to foster trust and encourage participation.”

KEY ISSUE

LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY OF SERVICES

Adequate, long-term funding is critical to the sustainability and scale up of harm reduction programmes in the region. Appropriate levels of funding, based on accurate and up-to-date data on population sizes, results in adequate programming to meet needs and public health goals. Funding for the rapid expansion of HIV prevention, testing and treatment in areas with high HIV prevalence has resulted in strong and steady reductions in HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths. We need to learn from this example and scale up harm reduction services.³⁰ However, there is a substantial funding gap in the region's HIV response. An additional major concern is the decline in domestic HIV funding, which was 7% lower in 2022 than 2018.³¹

Total HIV resources were 8% lower in 2022 than 2021, and the region's response remains heavily reliant on external donors. This has had a significant impact on harm reduction, as international donors primarily fund these services as part of HIV prevention activities.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria,^{32,33} United States' Aid (USAID),³⁴ the Robert Carr Fund,³⁵ and the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) are the main international organisations that fund harm reduction programmes in West and Central Africa. However, this funding is falling and is inadequate to meet need. While PEPFAR and USAID increased their contributions to 23% and 85%, respectively, between 2010 and 2020, contributions from other international donors reduced by 79%.³⁶ The total number of international donors investing in harm reduction remains small, and the total funds invested by international donors is shrinking.³⁷ Securing domestic funding is a more sustainable approach. Low- and middle-income countries' underinvestment in their HIV responses has contributed significantly to the failure to meet global targets for 2020.³⁸ This partly explains why the region has not scaled up existing NSPs, and why other lifesaving interventions such as OAT, take-home naloxone and DCRs remain non-existent or inadequate.³⁹ In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying economic downturn, the lack of government or other domestic resources has caused a difficult funding environment to become even more challenging.⁴⁰ Globally, governments spend 750 times more resources to enforce punitive and ineffective drug control laws than they spend on harm reduction programmes.⁴¹

This funding gap does not only hinder the scaling up of harm reduction programmes, it also restricts advocacy for harm reduction and human rights. It also places a financial burden on people who use drugs and their families, requiring them to pay out-of-pocket for access to harm reduction services.⁴² This economic burden varies between countries. For instance, in Ghana, private residential rehabilitation centres charge as much as Ghc 3,000 (USD 200) per month, while a non-residential centre costs an average of Ghc 1,500 (USD 100) per month.

Over-reliance on external funding for public health programmes can result in poor programming. For example, the Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria procured a large supply of methadone under the Drug Revolving Fund scheme. However, while the Ministry was seeking donor investment to support the implementation of an OAT programme, the treatments expired.⁴³ In another example, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission agreed with the Sierra Leone government to establish the first drug treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction centre in the country. The government designated its only psychiatric teaching hospital, which receives most drug referrals, as the location and renovated it in 2020 with support from Partners in Health and Handicap International so that it would be able to offer these services. However, these services are yet to commence due to ECOWAS funding delays.⁴⁴

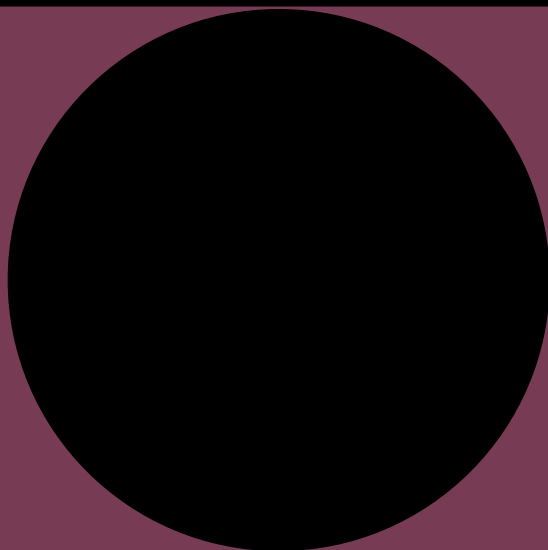
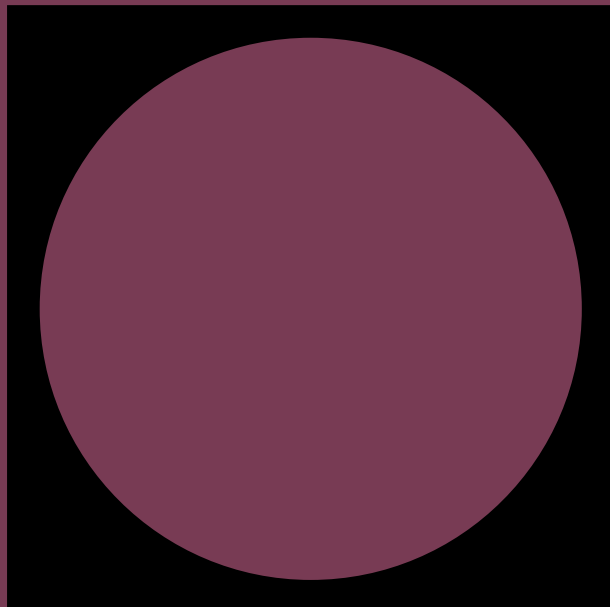
In Senegal, while drug use is still criminalised, the government supports the Centre de Prise en Charge Intégrée des Addictions de Dakar (the Integrated Addictions Management Centre of Dakar), a drop-in clinic that aims to curb the spread of HIV. The fact that the centre does not solely depend on external donors for funding⁴⁵ partially explains its sustainability since 2014 and the expansion of its services. The centre has gone from providing methadone as the first harm reduction centre in West and Central Africa to becoming a testing and diagnostic centre for HIV, tuberculosis and hepatitis and also implements condom distribution.⁴⁶

In July 2024, Ghana launched its first harm reduction (drop-in) centre for people who inject drugs and people living with HIV with support from the Global Fund. This is a timely opportunity for the government to invest domestic resources in the programme to ensure its sustainability.

Mobilising both external and in-country resources, as well as increasing national health budgets and prioritising HIV, key population programming and harm reduction services within those budgets, will be critical to the sustainability of harm reduction programmes in the region.

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REGIONAL OVERVIEW: WESTERN EUROPE



AUTHOR OF WESTERN EUROPE REGIONAL OVERVIEW: **Robert Csák**



Robert Csák is a sociologist and researcher. His research has focused on various aspects of harm reduction. He has worked in needle and syringe programmes, community outreach, HIV and HCV testing and counselling for over 10 years. He has worked on the *Global State of Harm Reduction 2020 and 2022* and is the author of the Harm Reduction International report on Low Dead Space Syringes.

TABLE EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HIV AND VIRAL HEPATITIS, AND HARM REDUCTION RESPONSES IN WESTERN EUROPE

Country/territory	People who inject drugs	HIV prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis C (anti-HCV) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Hepatitis B (anti-HBsAg) prevalence among people who inject drugs (%)	Harm reduction responses				
					NSP ^a	OAT ^b	Peer distribution of naloxone ^c	DCR ^d	Safer smoking equipment ^e
Andorra	nd ^f	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Austria	15,000	12.3	16.7	4.4	✓ 55	✓ B M	✓	✗	✓
Belgium	7,000	4.5	48.8	2	✓ 243	✓ B H M	✗	✓ 2	✓
Cyprus	710	3.5-7.1	42.4	4.7	✓ 33	✓ B M	✗	✗	nd
Denmark	nd	1.3	65.6	1.3	✓ 5	✓ B H M	✗	✓ 5	nd
Finland	25,000	1.2	73.7	nd	✓ 84	✓ B M	✗	✗	nd
France	125,500	6	41.7	0.8	✓ 1,220	✓ B M	✗	✓ 2	✓
Germany	nd	4.1	62.9	0.9	✓ 475	✓ B H M	✓	✓ 25	✓
Greece	3,287	7.3	53.7- 69.6	2.1	✓ 18	✓ B M	✗	✓ 1	✓
Iceland	500	5	10	nd	✓	✓	nd	✓ 1	nd
Ireland	688	8.3	77.2	nd	✓ 140	✓ B M	✓	✗	✓
Italy	105,652	28.3	63.8	nd	✓ 152	✓ B M	✓	✗	✓
Liechtenstein	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Luxembourg	822	1.9	71.1	nd	✓ 10	✓ B M	✗	✓ 2	nd
Malta	805	0.2	43.8	0	✓ 10	✓ B M	✗	✗	nd
Monaco	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Netherlands	840	2.6	61	0	✓	✓ B H M	✗	✓ 25	✓
Norway	7,878	1.3	38.8	1.5	✓	✓ B H M	✗	✓ 2	nd
Portugal	28,287	13	71.9	5.7	✓ 1997	✓ B M	✓	✓ 3	✓
San Marino	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd
Spain	6,762	32	45.9	5.3	✓ 866	✓ B M	✓	✓ 16	✓
Sweden	nd	5.1	65.2	1.5	✓ 30	✓ B M	✗	✗	nd
Switzerland	42,000	1.4	74.6	nd	✓	✓ B H M	✗	✓ 14	✓
Türkiye	nd	0.8	37.5	3.9	✗	✓ B M	✗	✗	nd
United Kingdom ^g	341,032	1.5	57	5.9	✓	✓ B H M	✓	✗	✓ ^h

a At least one needle and syringe programme operational in the country or territory, and the number of programmes (where data is available).

b At least one opioid agonist therapy programme operational in the country or territory, and the medications available for therapy. B=buprenorphine, H=heroin, M=methadone, N=Naloxone

c At least one naloxone distribution programme that engages people who use drugs (peers) in the distribution of naloxone and naloxone training, and facilitates secondary distribution of naloxone between peers.

d At least one drug consumption room (also known as safe consumption sites among other names) operational in the country or territory, and the number of facilities.

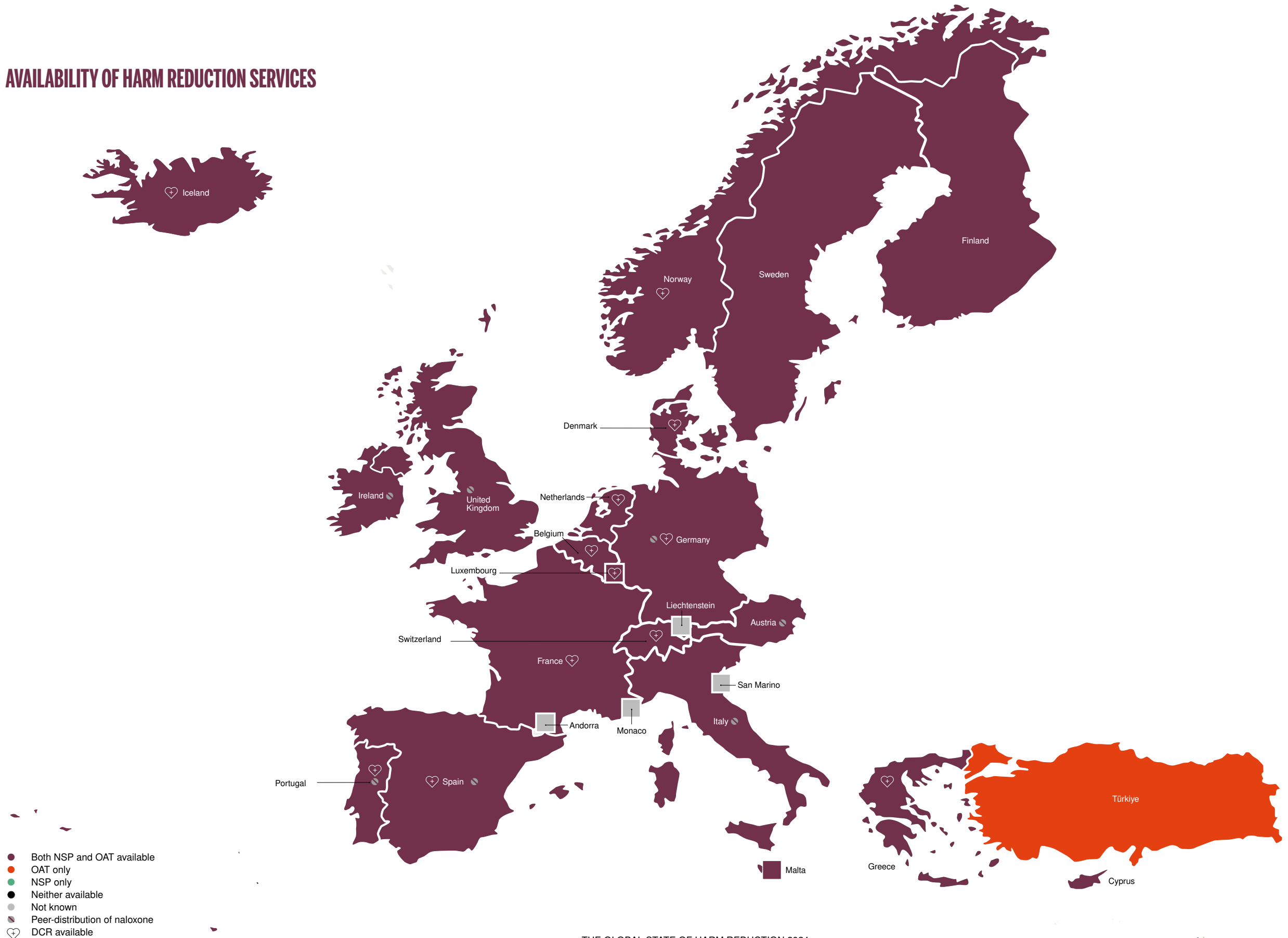
e At least one programme in the country or territory distributing safer smoking equipment to people who use drugs.

f nd = no data

g The United Kingdom population size estimate for people who inject drugs refers to subnational data from England and Scotland only. The data on HIV and viral hepatitis refers to England, Northern Ireland and Wales only.

h Pilot programme

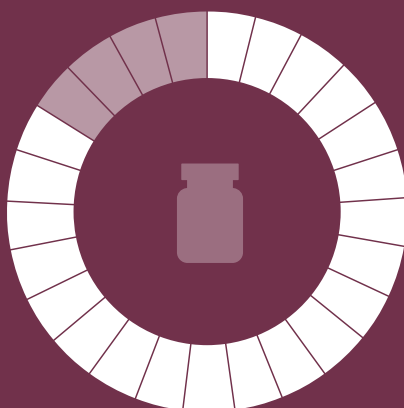
AVAILABILITY OF HARM REDUCTION SERVICES



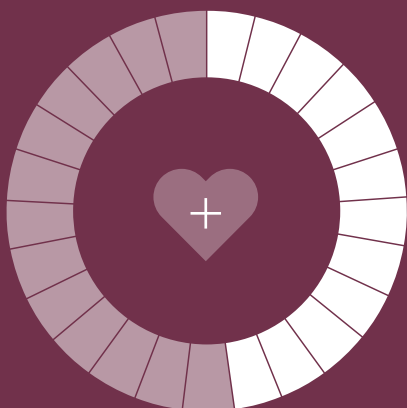
NSP, OAT, DCRs AND SAFER SMOKING KITS



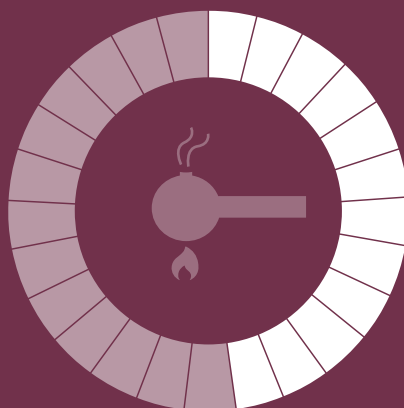
20 countries (80%) in Western Europe provide **needle and syringe programmes** (no change from 2022)



21 countries (84%) in Western Europe provide **opioid agonist therapy** (no change from 2022)



12 countries in Western Europe provide **drug consumption rooms** (no change from 2022)



12 countries in Western Europe provide **safer smoking kits** (+2 countries from 2022, Greece and Ireland)

KEY ISSUE

SERVICES FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Western Europe is one of the regions where core harm reduction services like needle and syringe programmes (NSP) and opioid agonist therapy (OAT) are available in almost every country¹ and harm reduction has been explicitly included in national drug strategies and action plans for years. Western Europe has the most countries of any region in which drug consumption rooms (DCRs) and drug checking services are available. Despite harm reduction being an established public health intervention in the region, marginalised groups such as women, LGBTQI+ people, migrants and people in prison and other closed settings, are underserved and face barriers in accessing harm reduction services.^{2,3,4} Marginalised groups of people who use drugs should have access to harm reduction services tailored to their needs to ensure appropriate coverage, not only to achieve public health goals but to realise the right to health and human rights for all.

According to the Correlation-European Harm Reduction Network's recent report, which summarises responses from 35 European cities in 30 countries, harm reduction services are delivered to the greatest extent to people who inject opiates, while the least served population in Europe are young people under the age of 18 who use drugs.^{5,6} Despite adolescence being a common time for starting substance use, harm reduction for under 18s, particularly in school settings, is still controversial.^{7,8,9,10} Age restrictions

prevent adolescents who use drugs from getting vital services. For example, DCR, NSP and drug checking services are for adults-only in many countries as under 18s are not formally permitted to use these services (e.g. in Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland).^{11,12,13,14}

Being at the intersection of different vulnerabilities can make access to services difficult. It can be a precarious situation if you are someone who does not identify as belonging to the groups that are targeted by harm reduction programmes.

For example, people who engage in chemsex can be at the intersection of other marginalised groups and their needs may not be appropriately met either by programmes focusing on gay men and other men who have sex with men or by programmes for people who use drugs – and stigma stops many from engaging with harm reduction services.^{15,16} Despite suitable harm reduction services having been developed across the region, people engaging in chemsex are still the second least-served population in Europe.^{17,18} The services that are available focus on men, while heterosexual couples in the swingers scene or lesbians and other women who have sex with women are rarely mentioned in the chemsex context. But that does not mean people who use drugs during sex who are outside of the chemsex scene do not need services. O'Yes in Belgium, which offers lesbians and other women who have sex with

women consultations with health professionals to discuss issues related to sexualised drug use, is an example of a service that does cater to underserved populations. But such services are not widespread, and without adequate support these important subpopulations are likely to be missed.¹⁹

Migrants are also inadequately served by harm reduction services in the region. They face significant barriers to accessing health services; the most prominent relate to their legal status, the discrimination they experience and cultural differences.^{20,21,22,23} Migrants who use drugs face many barriers, on top of being stigmatised for using drugs, such as xenophobia and racism. Administrative barriers including language, can hinder access to health and harm reduction services.^{24,25,26,27} For example, in Berlin, Russian-speaking migrants, West African migrants and migrants from Maghreb Arab countries are present, all with unique characteristics and needs, speaking different languages.²⁸ Integrated services involving professionals such as interpreters, multicultural mediators and peer navigators are crucial in this setting.^{29,30}

Gaps in the range of available harm reduction services still exist in the region. For example, harm reduction for people who use opioids is the most common type of intervention, but people who use opiates intranasally (through the nose) are greatly underserved and can only receive heroin-assisted treatment in Switzerland.^{31,32}

implementing appropriate services for all, especially in a region where harm reduction is an established intervention supported in national strategies. People who use drugs are a heterogeneous group made up of different populations with diverse needs. To ensure appropriate access for everyone, peers from different drug-use groups should be involved in providing support, from designing an intervention to evaluating it, so services and materials are informed by and centred around the specific and diverse needs, circumstances and priorities of all people who use drugs.³³

There is a need to bridge these gaps by

“People who use drugs are a heterogenous group made up of different populations with diverse needs. To ensure appropriate access for everyone, peers from different drug-use groups should be involved in providing support, from designing an intervention to evaluating it, so services and materials are informed by and centred around the specific and diverse needs, circumstances and priorities of all people who use drugs.”

KEY ISSUE

EXPANSION OF DRUG CHECKING SERVICES

Drug checking services analyse drug samples that people who use drugs submit. These services provide feedback to clients and offer counselling based on the results to help people reduce the risks associated with drugs containing unknown components, unknown quantities of components and unwanted substance interactions.³⁴ Drug checking services can also be used as a tool to monitor drug markets, and in Western Europe the data they provide is making a substantial contribution to regional knowledge on the substances available and emerging trends.^{35,36,37,38} For example, drug checking services were instrumental in detecting synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists in herbal cannabis in Zurich, Switzerland.³⁹ Drug checking services are currently available in 13 of 25 countries in the region (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK).^{40,41} In Ireland and Greece, these services are only available at some music festivals.^{42,43}

A systematic review of drug checking services since 1990 found that people who used them consistently reported having a greater intention not to use drugs if the result of a drug-checking test was unexpected, questionable or suspicious.⁴⁴ Evidence included in the review also demonstrates the capacity of drug checking services to detect new psychoactive substances and drugs of concern that are available on the ground, while providing information on both expected and detected content.⁴⁵

Despite mounting evidence about the benefits of drug checking services, legal barriers – along with a lack of political will to change the policy environment – prevent the implementation or scale up of existing drug checking services in the region.⁴⁶

Other studies also show that drug checking services can influence people's behaviour, and unexpected results can stop people taking the drug being checked, using less and applying harm reduction practices, such as not mixing substances.^{47,48} Enacted behaviour over the longer term is less researched.⁴⁹ However, a recent study in Portugal followed people who had used a drug checking service at a festival for six months to check their behaviour compared to their intentions after getting unexpected test results.⁵⁰ They found that, after six months, 71% of clients reported enacting behaviour that matched the intention they expressed when they got the test result (for example, not taking an ecstasy pill when it did not contain MDMA).⁵¹ Six months after using the drug checking services at the festival, there was an increase in most harm reduction practices among respondents.⁵²

Drug checking might be useful outside of nightlife settings too. For example, an organisation in Belgium made drug checking services part of its programme for people engaged in chemsex.⁵³ Research on heroin and cocaine used in DCRs in Luxembourg compared clients' expectations and

the level of active compound measured, and found that most people had very limited information on the active compound content of the substance they were about to use.⁵⁴ In the Netherlands, an intermediate testing project is being piloted until the end of 2024. Here, field workers can test drugs that belong to people who they meet during street outreach, thus providing information on the drugs available in more marginalised communities.⁵⁵

The public health benefits of implementing drug checking services are evident, and may be particularly useful given the emergence of synthetic opioids across the globe, including in Western Europe (for example, nitazenes in the UK, or fentanyl derivatives in Sweden and Austria).^{56,57}

Decision makers should be aware that a drug checking service is a simple tool that increases people's safety and helps them to make informed decisions about the drugs they use.⁵⁸

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