



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

**“Each person counts”  
Policymakers must and can make a difference.**



## Overview

The UNODC Policymakers Training Package on the Nature, Prevention, and Treatment of Drug Use Disorders aims at strengthening the commitment of policymakers towards the healthy and safe development of children and towards improving the lives of those affected by drug use disorders.

- Drug use prevention strategies should deliver an integrated range of interventions and policies to ensure that children and youth, especially the most marginalised and poor, can realise their full potential.
- Drug dependence treatment and care strategies should recognise that drug use disorders are multi-factorial health disorders that often follow the course of a relapsing and chronic health condition. Evidence-based, effective, and voluntary treatment and care services, that guarantee the same quality standards and opportunities that are provided for any other health disorders, need to be put in place.





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## Background Information

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

It aims to increase the availability of and access to comprehensive systems of care for people affected by drug use and drug use disorders.

With the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS) Outcome Document and Target 3.5 under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to a balanced and health-centred system approach.

The UNODC Policymakers training package utilises a variety of training methods and tools to ensure an effective, interactive, participatory, and enriching learning process. Opportunities are provided for participants to interact and build on their experiences. The training allows for a review and analysis of existing drug demand reduction strategies in a country, and to develop an action plan to adapt and enhance national strategies.

An interactive policy maker training is typically delivered by UNODC experts over 3-4 days to approximately 25-30 participants from different sectors in a country (including drug control, health, justice, education, law enforcement, youth, social welfare, etc.).

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## Purpose of the Policymakers Training

- **Offer** policymakers the latest **information from science** on drug use prevention and drug use disorder treatment and care.
- **Strengthen** the **capacity of policymakers** to draft, negotiate, advocate and support evidence-based drug policies as they relate to protecting the lives of people at risk of and affected by substance use disorders whilst ensuring safety and security of the community.
- **Provide** the **opportunity for** policymakers to engage in **multisectoral** and **cross-sectoral collaborations** to enhance multilateral partnerships and uniform approaches on preventing and treating drug use disorders.
- **Provide policymakers with tools** to reinforce their commitment to address stigma and discrimination, break social exclusion, increase opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.
- **Encourage policymakers to design science-driven and effective interventions**, to invest appropriate human and financial resources in drug demand reduction, and to share the responsibility of care.



## Target Audience for the Policymakers Training

The UNODC Policymakers training package is specifically tailored towards policy and lawmakers alike, with key decision-making responsibilities from the health, social, justice, education, and other relevant sectors. It aims to provide relevant decision-makers with an overall understanding of the nature of drug use and drug use disorders and of evidence-based prevention and treatment strategies.





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## **Description of the Policymakers Training**

The training encompasses a range of modules which cover a variety of topics related to the understanding of the nature of drug use and drug use disorders, as well as prevention, treatment, care, and rehabilitation services. In line with a country's priorities, the relevant modules are selected for a specific training.

## Introduction

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This section aims at explaining drug use disorders from a scientific point of view, outlining historical perspectives on drug use, and explaining what types of psychoactive substance there are and their mechanisms of action, respectively.

## Evidence-based prevention

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This module describes prevention strategies that are based on scientific evidence working with families, schools, and communities to ensure that children and youth, especially the most marginalised and poor, grow and stay healthy and safe into adulthood and old age. Science informs that some factors make young people vulnerable (or, conversely, resilient) to initiation of substance use are closely related to a specific age group. Parenting and attachment to school are protective and resilience factors that have been identified as being particularly influential at the stages of infancy, childhood, and early adolescence.



## UNODC/WHO International Standards on Drug Use Prevention



UNODC, in close collaboration with WHO, launched the second version of the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention (2018), including a compendium of strategies that have been found effective in preventing substance use, including drug use, and other risky behaviour by supporting the healthy and safe development of children and youth.

## UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders



The aim of this chapter is to provide policymakers with an overview of the WHO/UNODC International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, launched in 2020. The Standards offer a comprehensive framework for establishing effective systems and services for drug use disorder treatment and care, emphasising a continuum of care approach.



## A system and service level perspective for the delivery of effective drug dependence treatment and care



The aim of this chapter is to inform policymakers in directing resources where they are most needed from a public health perspective, focusing on easily accessible outpatient treatment and care services. It advocates for a comprehensive approach, such as a one-stop-shop or a network of services in the community, to deliver a continuum of care in a coordinated manner.

## Screening, brief interventions and referral to treatment (SBIRT)



This chapter explains the importance of screening, brief interventions and referral to treatment. As outlined in the UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, SBIRT is an evidence-based intervention used to identify, and support people who use psychoactive substances for non-medical purposes, particularly in non-specialised health settings. The module also provides an overview of possible brief interventions, outlines standard assessment, and diagnosis instruments, and explains their importance.





## Pharmacological treatment



This chapter summarises the evidence for and application of pharmacological treatment for drug use disorders in combination with psychosocial interventions. It highlights the different settings and stages for the use of medication assisted approaches to drug use disorders. This module addresses withdrawal management, maintenance treatment, relapse prevention, and the management of co-occurring disorders.

## Psychosocial treatment



Policymakers will learn about different psychosocial interventions for drug dependence treatment. Evidence-based psychosocial treatments include a variety of counselling strategies and behavioural techniques for the effective treatment of drug use disorders, such as motivational interviewing, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and contingency management. They can enhance pharmacological treatment efficacy by increasing medication compliance, retention in treatment and acquisition of skills that reinforce the effects of medications. In addition, these interventions ensure long-term support of recovery maintenance.







## **Co-occurring and mental health disorders**



The learning objectives of this module are for participants to define what dual diagnosis with respect to drug use disorders is, understand related mental health disorders, discuss policy implications for the treatment of dually diagnosed individuals and understand some of the challenges associated with providing such services.

## **Interventions in populations with special needs**



This module aims at outlining the different groups of populations with special clinical needs, including children, women, elderly, minorities, the LGBTQI+ community and others.

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



This chapter informs about the options for diverting people with drug use disorders in contact with the criminal justice system, in appropriate cases, to drug treatment services as an alternative to conviction or punishment, and improving knowledge on treatment in prison settings.

## Drug use disorders and national drug policies



The chapter helps policymakers understand how the perceptions of drug use and drug use disorders shape national drug policies. It emphasises that drug use disorders are complex health conditions that require multidimensional responses and are best treated in the health system. This comprehensive overview will equip policymakers with the knowledge needed to formulate evidence-based, effective, and humane national drug policies.





## Drug use disorders and the International Drug Conventions



This chapter helps policymakers understand the health-centred framework of the international drug control conventions. It also helps policymakers gain a comprehensive understanding of the international drug control system, which forms the overarching framework for both international and national drug policies. The chapter emphasises that the primary purpose of the International Drug Conventions is to ensure the appropriate access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while aiming to prevent non-medical use and protect public health.

## Drug use disorders and human rights



Policymakers will delve into various aspects of human rights relevant to drug policies, including ensuring adequate access to treatment and care or avoiding discrimination against individuals who use drugs. The chapter underscores the importance of protecting human rights throughout the treatment process, including preventing humiliation, respecting patient dignity, upholding the right to consent to treatment, and ensuring the right to withdraw.







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## **Policy development, strategic planning and coordination of services**



The aim of this chapter is to help policymakers learn the essential role of data and information in developing effective policies for demand reduction. They will understand the critical importance of monitoring and evaluation in the policy development cycle, which ensures that interventions remain relevant and effective. This knowledge will enable policymakers to make informed decisions, design strategic plans, and coordinate services effectively to address drug use disorders.

## **The politics of policy-making: gaining support for evidence-based policies**



In this chapter, policymakers will explore the political dynamics involved in the development and implementation of evidence-based policies for drug use disorders. The chapter highlights that while most decision-making tends to focus on short-term goals, it is crucial for policymakers to learn from evidence and build effective drug demand reduction strategies that can be transparently evaluated.





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#### CONTACT US

Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime  
P.O. Box 500, 1400 Vienna, Austria  
Email: [unodc-ptrs@un.org](mailto:unodc-ptrs@un.org)

Website: [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-prevention-and-treatment/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-prevention-and-treatment/index.html)



December 2024

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