

Reducing fatal opioid overdose

Prevention, treatment and harm reduction strategies

Foreword: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Partnership on Substance Abuse

The IFRC, the Italian Red Cross and the Villa Maraini Foundation, in response to high levels of drug use and related problems globally, have established a tripartite international partnership on substance abuse. The three institutions join efforts to maximize and leverage the expertise of each partner to support the Red Cross Red Crescent to expand comprehensive approaches to drug abuse, with a focus on harm reduction and the fight against stigma and social exclusion. Key activities directly contribute to support the IFRC Strategy 2020, the Strategic Operational Framework for Health (SoF) and the process of building resilience. Support is given to National Societies to enhance activities addressing and meeting the basic needs of communities suffering from drug abuse, as well as accessing health and education, eliminating health inequities and advocating for the respect of human rights.

In 2005, the Red Cross Red Crescent, led by the Italian Red Cross, initiated a strong advocacy initiative to promote a humanitarian drug policy in response to the health disaster caused by drug use and drug addiction. The document called the Rome Consensus, signed by over 120 National Societies, provides a framework that clearly lays out health principles and practices, information and research on drug consumption issues and best practices in drug policy responses, and assists National Societies in implementing effective actions and programmes within their communities.

In 2011, the Governing Board meeting adopted a special decision on substance abuse to reinforce the Red Cross Red Crescent response to drug-related issues. In 2012, IFRC signed a partnership agreement with UNODC to address the issues of drug use and related harm at the community level. Today a number of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide have already initiated harm reduction strategies in collaboration with governments and other multi-lateral and non-governmental organizations. Activities support drug users and advocate for the acceptance, introduction and maintenance of harm reduction programmes. Harm reduction projects demonstrate encouraging results in addressing the problem. Since 2004, Italian Red Cross and IFRC, in collaboration with Villa Maraini, have been offering training services to National Societies and other partners.

The Partnership strongly encourages National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies around the world to take note of the following set of recommendations put forward to counter the threat of fatal opioid overdose: a severe threat to public health everywhere. In addition, the document which accompanies these recommendations gives background information on heroin overdose and one specific harm reduction strategy that has proved very successful. This is the Italian Red Cross Villa Maraini programme to treat heroin overdose on the street.

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