

MEET, TEST & TREAT

A Red Cross/Red Crescent call to ACTION!

26TH of June - International Day against Drug Abuse

The 26th of June is the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, established by the UN General Assembly in 1987.

2016 is a significant year for drug policy – with the UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in April and the UN High Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in early June. As Red Cross and Red Crescent we have a unique opportunity to call for policies that safeguard equitable access to health care. We therefore can urge governments to implement effective measures to reduce the harm caused by drugs that are people-centred, human rights based and inclusive. A public health and human rights approach to drug policy should be seen as an **opportunity** for introducing **new approaches**.

The importance of testing

More than **12 million people** in 158 countries **currently inject drugs**, close to **1.7 million** of whom **are living with HIV**.¹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that illicit drug use will continue to rise by up to 25% between 2012 and 2050. The sharing of injecting equipment is driving HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) transmission in many parts of the world. Therefore, reaching and testing those at risk of infection is still a public health challenge across the world.

That's why it's better for people at risk to know their status as soon as possible. Today, HIV treatments advances mean that **people living with HIV can live healthily** for a long time if they are diagnosed early and **those with hepatitis C can be cured**.

Late diagnosis and delayed access to treatment are the most important factors associated with ongoing transmission of HIV and HCV and preventable related illnesses and death. That's why a **greater access to the test and treatment is a fundamental challenge for the entire Movement to saving people lives** as recommended by UNAIDS².

Red Cross/Red Crescent approach

Strategy 2020 recognizes the diverse health roles that Red Cross and Red Crescent play at community and country level. Community-based health programmes bring better health to disadvantaged and underserved populations. The international Movement can play a key role to safeguard the well-being of drug users and allow them to minimize harm to themselves and others by offering simple life-saving services and continuous support. One of the major cultural challenge is to let people understand that injecting drug use should not be seen as a criminal act, but as a major public health issue.

Harm Reduction

A cost-effective harm reduction programmes that use peer-based outreach and feature clean needle and syringe programmes, opiate substitution therapy and HIV - HCV testing and treatment are proven by scientific evidence to be effective in reducing transmission, crime

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2015 The World Drug Report, 2015 <http://www.unodc.org/wdr2015/>

² UNAIDS fast track strategies 90 90 90: http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/90-90-90_en_0.pdf

rates and overdose deaths. Without the access and trust we will not achieve this goal. In order to have any success people need to be reached (meet), tested and treated.

Meet, Test & Treat

Means making actions to support vulnerable people instead of punish them!

This call to action aims to minimize the harm of drugs promoting activities that contribute to improve: the access to health and to harm reduction interventions.

Meet: contact the population and in particular the hard-to-reach groups through our volunteers aiming to raise awareness on substance abuse and risk behaviour creating a trust linkage with RC/RC community.

Test: offering people HIV and HCV quick testing and counselling (HTC), creating a linkage to medical care system.

Treat: facilitate the access to HIV and HCV treatment, care and, especially for hard-to-reach groups.

What can we do this year?

The 26th of June is a good occasion for people everywhere to promote greater understanding of drug use as a social and health condition that calls for sustained prevention, treatment and care.

Organizing at local level some activities and actions which can contribute to this aim is recommended in order to create a parallel common *action* in different NSs during the 26th of June.

RC/RC Partnership on Substance Abuse proposes *key actions* that shall be provided to encourage the visibility of the International day against drug abuse:

- streets intervention to reach people who have risk behaviour: sex workers, injecting drug users, youth, migrants, prisoners, man who have sex with man, co-infected with TB etc.
- organize, provide and encourage quick HIV and/or Hepatitis C test in public square and among low-threshold areas to sensitize the population with particular attention for people who could be more at risk;
- peer education activities among young people conducted by volunteers;
- activities are conducted together with local CSOs and/or affected communities (networks of drug users, people living with HIV etc.);
- promotion of public event on the 26th of June involving local authorities and population.