

EU Drugs Strategy Taking Step in the Right Direction

International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies (IDHDP) welcomes the European Union Committee’s Twenty-Sixth Report on the need for the EU Drugs Strategy and applauds its work in providing a guiding framework within which Member States can formulate their national drug policies.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201012/ldselect/ldcom/270/27002.htm>

More importantly, it is taking an important step in calling for re-evaluating its focus, away from vague broad-brush demand control towards more effective public health oriented national drug strategies such as Portugal’s, recognising the important role that harm reduction measures such as provision of sterile needles and opioid substitution treatment play in reducing both the use of drugs and the problems that drug users face.

Commenting on the report, Dr Chris Ford, IDHDP’s medical director, said, “We know as doctors working in this field that drug policies affect the health of us all, but especially people who use drugs and those who are living with HIV and chronic pain. This report is a positive step forward in encouraging policy makers and clinicians to bridge the gap between evidence based practice and drug policy, and we support the committee’s call to ‘consider as dispassionately as possible the different policies and approaches [to dealing with drug problems] and to narrow the gap between theory and practice, and thus to achieve a better consensus about the best way of proceeding”.

“People who become dependent on drugs, whether street drugs or prescription pharmaceuticals, need to be treated with evidence-based care rather than like criminals who need punishment,” said Dr. Ford. And while all of the EU member states have needle exchange programs and substitution treatments, coverage is uneven and not meeting demand. Many EU countries have treatment for about 50% of their drug users, while the 12 countries that joined the EU since 2004 only account for 2% of substitution treatment in Europe. To effectively deal with Europe’s drug problems and the related health and social costs, policies need to address and close this gap.

International Doctors for Healthy Drug Policies is an all-doctor membership organisation, representing doctors from 49 countries worldwide.

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