

#PWUDCOUNT

campaign

On the occasion of the **International Overdose Awareness Day (August 31st)**¹, the organization "DIOGENIS Drug Policy Dialogue" continues the awareness campaign with the slogan "Persons Who Use Drugs Count". This International Day has been established as a day of remembrance for people who have lost their lives or have been harmed as a consequence of drug overdose and is aimed at raising awareness among the general population and all relevant stakeholders around the issue of overdose, on the reduction of stigma that often accompanies drug-related deaths and to produce political pressure to adopt measures to prevent overdose, such as adequate access to **naloxone** and the operation of sites for supervised use of psychoactive substances.

Despite the fact that overdose deaths can be prevented, the necessary emphasis has not yet been given to the effective management of this phenomenon, which is among the main causes of death among opioid injecting people. According to data from the EMCDDA, 7,000-8,000 drug-related deaths are reported annually in Europe, of which 78%² are connected to the use of opioids, mainly of young people aged 20-30 with a history of intravenous heroin use. Among the risk factors for overdose are: substance abuse, low substance tolerance due to abstinence (e.g. after imprisonment, detoxification), impaired physical/mental health, unstable housing/living conditions, social isolation, purity of the substance, mode of use, etc.³

The risk of overdose of opioid deaths is significantly reduced in those who follow substitution treatment. In addition, innovative interventions in high risk environments, such as prisons, and interventions that actively involve drug users themselves in overdose prevention and which increase their capacity to manage the overdoses they are presenting are increasingly being applied. One of these is the administration of Naloxone, an opioid antagonist substance, which reverses their effects on the user's body within minutes.

In the effort to prevent overdose deaths in **Europe**, **Naloxone** use and education programs are being implemented to relatives and friends of users, with the ability to have their take home program in **10** countries. Also in **7** countries, there are sites for supervised use of psychoactive substances (78 in total), to prevent overdose deaths for those who are homeless or have no supportive environment.

The "**Persons Who Use Drugs Count**" campaign aims to inform and raise awareness among the general population and all relevant stakeholders, for the need for Greece to follow this example through the adoption of a **National Strategy**, which will include the granting of **Naloxone** as a measure to prevent overdose deaths, combined with other measures such as the operation of sites for supervised use of psychoactive substances, an increase in the number of syringes distributed in the users population and the implementation of substitution programs in all prisons. Adopting a corresponding policy is also part of the EU's drugs policy (2017-2020)⁴, the UNGASS 2016 outcome document⁵ and the World Health Organization (WHO).

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¹ <https://www.overdoseday.com/about-us/>

² <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2018/drd>

³ http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/932/TDAU14009ENN.web_.pdf

⁴ http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/attachments/5222/Cover_Action8extract.pdf_en

⁵ <http://www.dioGENIS.info/cms/files/2016/12/Outcome-Documents-UNGASS-2016-GR.pdf>