

#PWUDCOUNT

campaign

On the occasion of the **World Health Day** (April 7th), organization “**Diogenis – Drug Policy Dialogue**”, continues its awareness campaign entitled “**Persons Who Use Drugs Count**”. It is the second of the selected international / world days the campaign will run through 2018. In 1948 at the first World Health Council meeting, Member States established April 7th as “World Health Day”. The aim is to raise awareness and mobilize states on a major issue of global health every year. For 2018, the theme of World Health Day is universal access to Health, with the motto “**Health for All**”. <http://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2018/en/>

The “Persons Who Use Drugs Count” campaign directly links universal access to health services with the access problems faced by the highly vulnerable and marginalized population of people using psychoactive substances. Social stigma, repressive policies and exclusion hinder equal access for psychoactive drug users to health services, thus hindering access to treatment and harm reduction programs. The failure of the existing international drug control system was recognized during the UN Special Session of the General Assembly on Drugs (UNGASS 2016), where it was highlighted that “people should be the focus of international and national drug policies” and underlined the importance of legislative changes ensuring safety, protection, public health, respect for human rights and the fundamental principles of freedom for every human being without discrimination.

Policy planning and decision-making must always be done on the basis of the promotion of health and human rights and on the principles of accountability, community involvement and non-discrimination. In order to ensure that national policies respect and promote the right to health, an evaluation was proposed through the **3AQ Framework**^{1 2}, according to which health services must be **Available, Accessible, Acceptable** and of sufficient **Quality**. Also, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 (§1):

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Our goal is to contribute to reducing stigma and ignorance both across the general population and stakeholders, by raising awareness regarding the shortcomings, barriers, negative effects and harms produced by the long term implementation of repressive policies and punitive measures undertaken to tackle the world drug phenomenon. These adverse effects caused by ineffective drug policies became more intense and prominent than ever, during a period of a profound economic and social crisis at global level: poverty, homelessness, exclusion from basic social goods, limited access to healthcare, welfare and essential medicines, increased rates of morbidity and mortality, limited livelihood opportunities, exclusion from job opportunities and barriers to skills development, disproportionate sentencing for minor drug related offenses and unequal participation in social dialogue.

In order to achieve our goal, it is of outmost importance that persons who use drugs will stop being marginalized and gain voice, equal access to opportunities and services and also participation in planning, implementation and evaluation processes of policies and programs on narcotic and psychoactive substances, as suggested by a number of international and European guidelines and recommendations.

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¹ Barrett, D. (2018). Drug Policy and Human Rights in Europe: Managing tensions, maximizing complementarities. Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe, Chapter 5.2, p.22 <https://rm.coe.int/drug-policyandhumanrights-in-europe-eng/1680790e3d>

² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 14, op. cit. paragraph 12.