



European Monitoring Centre  
for Drugs and Drug Addiction

MEETING REPORT

# Annual expert meeting on Drug-related deaths (DRD) and Drug-related infectious diseases (DRID)

Preliminary summary and highlights  
of the meeting

15–17 October 2014  
**EMCDDA, Lisbon**

## Preliminary summary and highlights

Two EMCDDA expert meetings, dedicated to the agency's drug-related deaths and mortality among drug users indicator (DRD) and the drug-related infectious diseases indicator (DRID), were held in Lisbon from 15–17 October.

This three-day event gathering the DRD and DRID key indicator networks offered a platform for expert discussion among European experts in the field. Attendance at the meetings was restricted to nominated experts of the 28 EU Member States, Norway and Turkey, invited speakers and guests. The agency's EU partners, international organisations and non-EU countries were also represented. Epidemiologists, clinicians and public-health practitioners brought to the table their multifaceted expertise and shared perspectives with the Reitox national focal points, EU- and non-EU national public health institutes, international organisations and civil society.

### Objectives of the key indicator expert meetings

The meetings aimed to:

- share and discuss the analysis of European data and new developments in the respective areas;
- discuss the state of progress of both indicators and technical points related to their implementation;
- discuss steps forward;
- discuss evidence on harm (deaths, infections, other morbidity), surveillance, monitoring, harm reduction, prevention and other responses;
- encourage cross-indicator and multifaceted analyses, as well as international interactions between invited and nominated experts of both indicators.

### Main topics covered

The DRD/DRID key epidemiological indicators expert meetings were again implemented in the new integrated format, launched in 2013, designed to inspire cross-discipline analyses of the drugs problem, including responses to it. Through this approach, the agency intends to obtain greater value from these annual expert events, strengthening what have become, over the last 10 years, valuable networks of excellence. The meetings featured individual and joint sessions, technical workshops and plenaries.

The meetings were designed to provide valuable insights into current European trends in drug-related health harms and to explore ways of targeting prevention responses more effectively and improving access to treatment. They focused on important and emerging issues, such as: overdose and toxicology; evidence from mortality cohort studies; new and changing groups of injectors; access to new HCV treatments; harms related to new psychoactive substances; cannabis-related emergencies; and polydrug use (including the misuse of medicines). Among the issues raised were the resurgence in heroin-related deaths in some European countries and new HIV infections related to injection of stimulants in other countries.

The key indicator DRD/DRID meeting was preceded by a satellite event entitled *Take home naloxone to reduce fatalities: scaling up a participatory intervention across Europe*, which was open to interested participants who were not part of the respective EMCDDA expert networks: [www.emcdda.europa.eu/events/2014/meetings/naloxone](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/events/2014/meetings/naloxone)

Further information and updates relating to the DRD/DRID expert meeting are available at [www.emcdda.europa.eu/expert-meetings/2014/drd-drid](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/expert-meetings/2014/drd-drid).

These include:

- a detailed agenda;
- a list of nominated and invited national experts;
- DRD and DRID national abstracts from 30 countries;
- presentations (in PDF format);
- supporting material, links, references;

This document presents a selection of highlights of the presentations and discussions that took place over the 2014 DRD/DRID expert meeting.

### **Some key points and new issues**

Provisional data suggest a slight increase in the total number of reported overdoses (6 700 estimated for 2013). A resurgence in heroin-related deaths in some European countries is reported and its context (purity, prices, treatment) is discussed (Sessions: 'Introduction/most recent data' and 'Heroin–methadone').

Cohort studies among drug users presented during this meeting suggest a large protective effect of treatment for opioid use in terms of opioid overdose risk — an important public health benefit (Session: 'Mortality cohort studies').

Benzodiazepine (BZD) increases the risk of drug fatal overdose, especially when combined with heroin, methadone or other opioids. Data presented from special mortality registries in Ireland, France, Portugal, the UK and Finland confirmed a high presence of BZD and sedatives in overdose deaths. Regarding 'High-risk drug users', harm reduction responses to overdose need to be scaled up and information on the risk of polydrug use, on resuscitation techniques and the use of naloxone reinforced (Session: 'Implication of benzodiazepines in drug-related deaths').

Cannabis-related acute emergencies are frequently reported in Europe and constitute a significant share of drug-related emergencies. (Session: 'Cannabis-related harm').

Multi-indicator insights on epidemiology and responses in Latvia and Estonia — countries that are characterised by high HIV incidence among PWID — revealed important commonalities among high-risk groups in both countries. However, while fentanyl was the most important substance responsible for high overdose mortality in Estonia, its use was not reported from Latvia. A short report about a joint ECDC–EMCDDA visit to Latvia was given, during which the status of surveillance and the effectiveness of prevention measures were examined (Session: 'High overdose mortality and HIV rates').

Results from behavioural surveillance studies and syringe programme monitoring in Spain, Germany and Scotland documented their usefulness to enhance prevention efforts and inform policy planning. A presentation of first results from EMCDDA behavioural data collection focused on their potential added European value (Session 'Using behavioural data and data from NEP to target prevention responses')

Europe's HCV epidemic among people who inject drugs urgently calls for scaling up HCV treatment. Treatment coverage for HCV is very low, compared to levels stipulated in current national and international recommendations. However, the potential does exist to tackle the

problem: effective HCV treatments have been available for years and new treatments are now being released (Session: 'HCV treatment as prevention').

New HIV infections related to the injection of stimulants are reported in many countries, particularly in Eastern Europe. Special attention should be given to prevention messages and harm reduction to prevent further contaminations. (Session: 'New threats/new drugs; new patterns of injecting and public health implications').

While Europe's visible population of PWID seems to be shrinking, populations using psychoactive drugs are changing. Prevention of transition to injection should be an absolute priority to reduce the incidence of HCV and HIV infections in particular, and of other harms in general (notably overdoses, in particular those with fatal outcome). Few countries have drawn up HCV strategies yet, there is a need for more strategic approach to HCV in Europe (Session: 'Decreasing prevalence/changes of drug injecting and possible effects on service provision').

Detailed minutes by session are under preparation with the respective chairs and speakers and will soon be available on the meeting web page, to complete the Documentation already uploaded.

Other updates, such as reference papers, reports, links to documents relevant to the experts, will be added also as required.

## **Further information**

DRD/DRID 2014 meeting

Steering group: Isabelle Giraudon, Dagmar Hedrich, Julián Vicente, Klaudia Palczak, Eleni Kalamara, Sofia Cabral, Sónia Vicente.

Contact us directly or use the [DRD-DRID-2014@emcdda.europa.eu](mailto:DRD-DRID-2014@emcdda.europa.eu) for communication related to the event.

DRD key indicator [www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/drd](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/drd)

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Link to the previous DRD/DRID meeting (October 2013)

[www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/expert-meetings/2013/drd-drid](http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/activities/expert-meetings/2013/drd-drid)

Link to Fact sheet 11/2014 'Drug-related harms and responses in focus at annual EMCDDA expert meetings' <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/news/2014/fs11>