

21 July 2017

INPUD Statement: Drug Users Remembrance Day



Record Overdose-Fatalities

People who use drugs are dying in increasing numbers. There are more than 200,000 drug-related deaths a year. Overdose deaths contribute to between a third and a half of all drug-related deaths. Last year, in the United States alone, overdose deaths exceeded 59,000. Overdose is *the* principal cause of death of North Americans younger than fifty years old. Not cancer; not heart attack or stroke; not vehicular accidents. Overdose. Avoidable overdose.

The vast majority of those who have died in the last several years have overdosed as a result of mistakenly taking **fentanyl or carfentanyl** instead of heroin and other opiates, with these newer, far stronger drugs increasingly being consumed due to the unregulated drug market under prohibition. Fentanyl is also causing increasing numbers of opiate overdoses and deaths throughout Europe and in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, young people have continued to die the world over as a result of **toxic adulterants and contaminants** being present in stimulants like MDMA and ecstasy, which are relatively *very* safe drugs when uncontaminated and when of known strength.

Why Are People who Use Drugs Dying?

These drug-related deaths are **avoidable**; resources, knowledge, information, education, and equipment exists to avoid these deaths. In the vast majority of cases, **overdose deaths are due directly to criminalisation, prohibition, and social exclusion**. Prohibition gives rise to a black market in which the composition and purity of drugs are unknown and cannot be determined. It is due to prohibition that people are overdosing and dying in record numbers when taking drugs they had not intended to use. Most overdoses occur in the presence of another person, but calling an ambulance and other medical assistance in a context of criminalisation often leads to police **harassment, arrest, violence, and imprisonment**.

Opioid overdose deaths are **entirely avoidable**. Though it is imperative to act as quickly as possible when somebody is overdosing, there can be a considerable period of time to reverse the overdose from opiate use, to resuscitate, and to prevent death from overdose. **Naloxone** is a safe drug that is very easy to use and administer and that reverses opiate overdose in seconds to minutes. Drug consumption rooms are well-stocked with naloxone, and employ staff trained to administer these life-saving drugs. The fact that there has never been a death from overdose in a drug consumption speaks for itself: **naloxone and harm reduction education save lives**. Yet naloxone is not widely available, and **take-home naloxone** cannot be purchased or acquired in most contexts despite the World Health Organisation emphasising the critical importance of community-based and peer-distribution of naloxone. Additionally, these drug-related deaths could have been avoided if comprehensive **harm reduction** had been available: **drug testing facilities** would allow people who use drugs to safely test the contents and purity of their drugs. Such facilities provide life-saving information without fear of legal repercussion and allow people who use drugs to do so more safely in the knowledge of their drugs' strength and purity, so that people who use drugs can avoid drugs that contain toxins and contaminants.

21st July: Today We Remember

INPUD's fundamental [human rights of people who use drugs](#) are clear: people who use drugs have **the right to life** and security of person; people who use drugs have **the right to the highest attainable standard of health**. Today is *Drug Users Remembrance Day*. It is the day that we remember our community members, our loved ones, our friends, and our family members who have died as a result of the so-called war on drugs. Today more than ever, the outcomes of this war are painfully clear: this is a war on the lives of people who use drugs. It is a war that results in pointless deaths, a war that results in people dying when their lives could easily have been saved, a war that results in people dying when their lives should have never even been at risk. **Each of these deaths is a needless death**. We are not collateral damage of a pointless, moralistic war; **we are people**: we have the right to life. We remember and reemphasise today that it is because of prohibition, it is because of the criminalisation of people who use drugs, and it is because of the stigma that surrounds drug use, that these deaths continue.

International Network of People who Use Drugs

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