

legitimate business-to-business trading platforms being used for the sale and purchase of substances under national control. While misuse of legitimate platforms for illicit purposes needs to be prevented, hindering the development of legitimate economic activities through the Internet needs to be avoided. **The Board encourages Governments to consider appropriate measures, in accordance with national law, to monitor and act on attempts to trade in new psychoactive substances through online trading platforms, including, possibly, voluntary monitoring and information-sharing, and to consider involving the operators of trading platforms.**

6. Illegal Internet pharmacies and the sale of internationally controlled drugs on the Internet

312. The Internet has permeated every aspect of people's lives in recent years and that includes matters of health. This has made it possible to buy medicines online, including those containing internationally controlled drugs. Unfortunately the online sale of medicines is sometimes conducted illegally, since some Internet pharmacies operate without licenses or registration and dispense pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances without requiring a prescription.

313. Illegal Internet pharmacies usually have dedicated websites. Those may be portal sites that advertise drugs and act as conduits to other websites where customers place their actual orders and pay. The drugs most frequently sold online include narcotic drugs, mostly oxycodone, hydrocodone, dextropropoxyphene and other opioids, and psychotropic substances, in particular benzodiazepines, stimulants and barbiturates. Precursors, i.e. chemicals that are frequently used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, are also traded online. In recent years the Internet-facilitated trade in precursors has expanded, an issue that is further examined in a special section of the report of the Board for 2017 on the implementation of article 12 of the 1988 Convention.⁸⁷

314. The scope of the phenomenon and the number of customers frequenting illegal Internet pharmacies is hard to gauge, as there have been no global data surveys or extensive clinical case studies on the matter. The Alliance for Safe Online Pharmacies, a non-governmental organization based in the United States, estimates that some

36 million Americans have purchased medications without a prescription at some point in their lives. A scientific systematic review has found that the number of people reporting that they have purchased medicines online, mostly from studies in the United States, ranges between 1 and 6 per cent of the population, a figure that is slightly higher in studies where the intention to buy online was also considered.

315. Illegal Internet pharmacies are often international operations with servers, pharmacy shipping operations and other parts of the business located in different countries. Most illegally operating Internet pharmacies do not require prescriptions from their customers at all, while some issue "prescriptions" after a brief online consultation or the completion of a short questionnaire. Illegally operating Internet pharmacies are the main sources of prescription-only medicines sold without prescriptions and of falsified prescription-only medicines.

316. Actions taken against illegal Internet pharmacies include helping the general public to identify websites that sell medicines legally. In the European Union, a common logo has been established indicating in which member State an online pharmacy or other type of online medicine retailer is based. The logo appears on the websites of all online medicine retailers registered with one of the national regulatory authorities in the European Union. A similar scheme exists in the United States, where the dot-pharmacy programme of verified websites is operated by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy with the aim of ensuring that participating pharmacies are operating safely and legitimately.

317. To assist Governments in their endeavours to address the challenge of illegal Internet pharmacies, the Board has published the *Guidelines for Governments on Preventing the Illegal Sale of Internationally Controlled Substances through the Internet*,⁸⁸ available on the Board's website (www.incb.org). The *Guidelines* were developed with the help of national experts and relevant international organizations such as the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), the Universal Postal Union, Internet service providers, financial service providers and pharmaceutical associations. The publication contains 25 individual guidelines that cover legislative and regulatory provisions, general measures and national and international cooperation. Their aim is to provide authorities assistance in formulating national legislation and policies to prevent the illegal sale of internationally controlled drugs through the Internet. Illegal Internet pharmacies are a growing phenomenon that has the potential to cause serious public health problems.

⁸⁷E/INCB/2017/4, chap. IV.

⁸⁸United Nations publication, Sales No. E.09.XI.6.

318. Governments in all regions have used the *Guidelines* in drafting and subsequently adopting legislation that empowers authorities to investigate and take legal action against illegal Internet pharmacies. This includes legislation allowing for the inspection of shipments by mail suspected of containing internationally controlled substances and legislation providing a framework for the operation of Internet pharmacies.

319. The continued growth of Internet access around the world, the widespread availability of online communication channels and the vastness of the deep web, the part of the Internet that is not accessible to search engines, all contribute to making drug trafficking over the Internet, whether through illegal Internet pharmacies or by other means, a significant crime threat. **In that connection the Board calls on Governments to continue to use the *Guidelines* pursuant to the recommendation expressed in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016.**⁸⁹

7. The International Import and Export Authorization System (I2ES): modernizing import and export authorization to ensure the availability of and access to controlled substances

320. Making indispensable narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances available for medical and scientific purposes while ensuring that there is no diversion or abuse: these two fundamental principles were set forth in the 1961 Convention as amended by the 1972 Protocol and the 1971 Convention. The commitment of the international community towards these goals was further reiterated in the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem held in 2016.

321. Pursuant to the 1961 and 1971 Conventions and to relevant resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, import and export authorizations are required for the international trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. An efficient and effective import and export authorization system that enables competent national authorities to expedite the process is crucial to ensuring the adequate availability of and access to controlled substances and to reducing the risk of diversion.

322. The volume of licit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control has increased continuously over the last decade. That rise is

expected to persist, as the availability of and access to internationally controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes increases in more and more countries.

323. I2ES, a web-based electronic system developed by the Board together with UNODC and with the generous financial and technical support of Member States, was designed to modernize the import and export authorization system and assist competent national authorities in managing their increasing workload. By achieving these goals, I2ES contributes to the implementation of the import and export authorization system as stipulated in the Conventions, and operational recommendation 2 (c), contained in the outcome document of the thirtieth special session of the General Assembly, on ensuring the availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

324. I2ES is provided to all Governments free of charge and serves as a secure and safe platform for uploading and exchanging import and export authorizations between trading countries. Competent national authorities can save much time and resources on verifying the authenticity of import and export authorizations via the secure portal. Real-time communication and exchange of information between authorities of trading countries is also possible whenever transactions require clarification or further processing.

325. The new tool modernizes the import and export authorization system while taking into consideration the needs and national systems of various Governments. I2ES enables countries with no existing national electronic systems to generate and transmit import and export authorizations electronically and to download and print them as necessary. It also provides them with a repository and data-bank of all their international trade in controlled substances, making it easier for them to monitor the trends in the use of controlled substances. Governments with existing national electronic systems can link up their systems with I2ES so that relevant data can be utilized for the further processing and exchange of import and export authorizations.

326. Throughout the development of I2ES, the Board has ensured that all business rules underlying the system fully comply with the relevant provisions of the 1961 and 1971 Conventions regarding import and export authorizations, and that the format and content of the authorizations fulfil all the requirements provided for in the Conventions and relevant decisions of the Commission.

327. With a number of built-in functions and automatic alerts, I2ES enables Governments to monitor the licit trade of internationally controlled substances and prevent their diversion. When, for a particular substance, the

⁸⁹General Assembly resolution S-30/1.