



Factsheet 1

Prevention and treatment – key to counteract the economic and social costs of drug abuse

Each dollar spent on prevention and treatment programmes can save up to ten dollars

Drug abuse affects numerous areas, including health, public safety, crime, productivity, and governance. Although accounting for the full, real dollar costs of drug abuse worldwide is challenging – due to data limitations – understanding the economic costs of drug abuse is necessary to develop policies that reduce such costs.

INCB stresses that drug prevention and treatment are among the most cost-effective responses to counteract the economic consequences of drug abuse. Most studies have shown that for every dollar spent, good prevention programmes can save governments up to US\$10 in later costs; therefore Governments' investments in prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programmes, and their regulatory control systems, must be maintained - even in times of financial austerity. While costs and consequences may vary widely across geographic regions, INCB, as part of its recommendations, urges Governments in all countries to integrate policies and initiatives against drug trafficking into national programmes, bearing in mind the principle of shared responsibility and the key goal of strengthening of institutions at all levels of governments.

Health, public safety, productivity, crime and governance - all economic and social costs of drug abuse

Health: Although the impact on health stands out as one of the most important consequences in terms of economic loss, investments in treatment are cost-effective versus the cost of untreated and continuing abuse or the cost of incarceration: in the United States every US\$1 invested in treatment yields a return of between US\$4 to US\$12 in reduced crime and healthcare costs.

Heroin, cannabis and cocaine are the drugs most frequently reported by people entering treatment worldwide, and only one in six problem drug users worldwide, some 4.5 million people, receives the required treatment, at a global cost of about US\$35 billion annually.

The proportion of drug users who receive treatment varies extensively from region to region. In Africa only 1 in 18 problem drug users receives treatment; in Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, approximately 1 in 11 problem drug users receives treatment, and in North America an estimated 1 in 3 problem drug users receives treatment interventions.

The drug-related mortality rate in North America remains the highest in the world, according to information provided by Governments in the region, with approximately 48,000 drug-related deaths in North America in 2011, which amounts to mortality rate of 155.8 per million inhabitants aged 15-64. Globally, it is estimated that there are 211,000 drug-related deaths annually, which account for between 0.5 and 1.3 per cent of all-cause mortality for people aged 15-64 years, with younger people facing a particularly high risk.