



**POLICY AND  
PROGRAMMING GUIDE  
FOR HIV/AIDS PREVENTION  
AND CARE AMONG  
INJECTING DRUG USERS**



**World Health  
Organization**

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**World Health  
Organization**

Department of HIV/AIDS

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# CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>1. Drug use and the vulnerability of injecting Drug users to HIV</b>                                  | <b>3</b>  |
| 1.1. Setting the scene: HIV and injecting drug use   | 3         |
| 1.2. Responding to HIV infection among IDUs at the local<br>and national level – assessing vulnerability | 10        |
| 1.3. Key determinants of vulnerability to HIV infection among IDUs                                       | 20        |
| <b>2. Policy development</b>   | <b>29</b> |
| 2.1. Components of a comprehensive policy to reduce HIV infection<br>among IDUs                          | 29        |
| 2.2. The policy-making process   | 41        |
| 2.3. Addressing the vulnerability to HIV infection<br>of specific IDU groups                             | 47        |
| <b>3. Programme development and implementation</b>   | <b>53</b> |
| 3.1 Translating strategies into action   | 53        |
| 3.2 Characteristics of effective programmes  | 57        |
| 3.3 Establishing and sustaining a programme  | 63        |
| <b>4. Major interventions</b>  | <b>67</b> |
| <b>5. Monitoring, evaluating and refining policies and programmes</b>                                    | <b>73</b> |
| <b>References</b>  | <b>78</b> |
| <b>Annex 1. Glossary</b>   | <b>80</b> |
| <b>Annex 2. Resources</b>  | <b>86</b> |



# INTRODUCTION

## WHY IS A POLICY AND PROGRAMMING GUIDE NEEDED?

**T**he epidemic of HIV infection and AIDS among injecting drug users (IDUs) and its spread from IDU populations to their sexual partners and the wider community is an important but often neglected aspect of the global AIDS pandemic. This neglect has resulted from:

- ▶ ignorance of the existence or extent of the epidemic;
- ▶ cultural, social and political constraints on the development of responses; and
- ▶ prejudice against people engaged in illegal behaviour such as drug use.

Nevertheless, the major reasons these epidemics are so often neglected are the lack of understanding of the importance of controlling the epidemic, ignorance of effective methods for controlling the epidemic and a lack of knowledge about how to develop effective responses.

The evidence is clear: early responses to HIV epidemics among and from IDUs can prevent their spread. Even where epidemics have taken off, they can be contained and reversed. Doing this requires:

- ▶ clarity of vision;
- ▶ concentrating on the approaches that have been effective; and
- ▶ recognizing that many other approaches, although socially and politically supported, are not only ineffective in preventing HIV (and drug use) but can actually promote the transmission of HIV among IDUs.

## WHAT IS A POLICY?

A policy is the guiding principles that set the tone and outline the actions required to address a specific issue or issues. A policy may be as simple as “honesty is the best policy” or may, for example, be a complicated document outlining a government’s beliefs about the type of health system it wants to run. A policy can describe a course or line of action to be adopted and pursued by a government, ruler, political party or organization. A policy is important in designing and establishing programmes, as it provides a constant reference point before, during and after a programme is implemented. A programme can evaluate whether its activities are following the principles outlined in the policy.

## WHAT IS MEANT BY PROGRAMMING?

Programming turns policy into reality. A policy can outline a specific desired outcome, the ideas or principles behind it and suggestions of how to achieve

these goals. Programming refers to the distinct interventions or activities needed to meet the objectives outlined in the policy. The activities of a programme need to be planned in detail if it is to succeed.

## FOR WHOM IS THIS GUIDE INTENDED?

This policy and programming guide is intended to be used by people throughout the world involved in developing policy and programmes on HIV/AIDS among IDUs, such as the members of national AIDS committees and councils and ministries of health. The guide may help these people by offering guidance on how to develop and implement comprehensive prevention responses at the national, district and local levels.

## WHAT IS IN THE GUIDE?

The guide concentrates on distilling the principles from policies and programmes that have worked well in responding to HIV/AIDS epidemics among IDUs. These principles can be transferred to other societies, but there is no definitive answer as to what will work. The issues involved in developing and sustaining effective responses to HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use are complex, and every society and community is different. How these principles are expressed in a specific society depends on the characteristics of that society. The guide is just that – a *guide*. It aims to help people in applying principles that have proved effective in dealing with HIV/AIDS and injecting drug use, but it will not be effective unless local circumstances are taken into account.

## HOW CAN THIS GUIDE BE USED?

The guide provides an overview of how a society can develop a comprehensive and effective response to epidemics of HIV/AIDS among and from IDUs. It is based on many years of experience in a great variety and number of different countries. This guide should be used in conjunction with the other resources relating injecting drug use and HIV/AIDS, such as the rapid assessment and response guides (Stimson et al., 1999; World Health Organization, 1999; UN

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