



IMPACT

COALITION

RESPONSE 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The J Healthcare Initiative is grateful for the chance to examine and respond to the Global Civil Society Report 2024, prepared by the Vienna and New York NGO Committees on Drugs (VNGOC and NYNGOC). This report presents valuable insights from 173 non-governmental organizations across 69 countries on progress, obstacles, and future directions related to the 11 issues outlined in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration on the global drug problem.

It plays a crucial role in amplifying the voices and experiences of NGOs actively engaged in addressing drug-related challenges.

At this pivotal midway point toward the target year of 2029, the report is instrumental in highlighting the frontline work of these organizations.

Aligned with our mission and values, we are addressing three specific challenges identified in the report:

- **Challenge 4:** Rising drug-related fatalities and the gap in treatment accessibility
- **Challenge 5:** High rates of infectious diseases transmission linked to drug use
- **Challenge 6:** Negative health impacts associated with new psychoactive substances

As a healthcare-focused NGO striving to advance evidence-based, rights-affirming approaches to drug policy and practice, the J Healthcare Initiative is particularly compelled to comment on the health-related challenges prominently raised in the report. Our response will focus on the progress, setbacks and ways forward outlined in the document regarding drug-related deaths and infectious disease transmission, access to controlled medicines, and the consequences of new psychoactive substances (NPS), among others.

We aim to contribute constructively to the discussions leading up to the 2024 mid-term review and beyond, guided by the imperative to place public health, human rights and the meaningful engagement of affected communities at the center of drug control efforts.

We once again commend the VNGOC, NYNGOC and all contributing NGOs on this crucial initiative to channel grassroots knowledge and insights to inform high-level policy deliberations. In the following sections, the J Healthcare Initiative is pleased to share our reflections on the report's salient findings and recommendations from our health-focused lens.

CHALLENGE 4

INCREASE IN DRUG-RELATED DEATHS AND UNMET NEED FOR TREATMENT

CONCERNS ON REGRESSING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS DRUG-PROHIBITION RELATED DEATHS

The J Healthcare Initiative is deeply troubled by the report's finding that a significant proportion of civil society respondents perceive efforts to address the escalating crisis of drug-related deaths as not merely stagnant, but actively regressing. This disturbing trend underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive, health-centered response that prioritizes saving lives above all else.

We resoundingly agree with the report's emphasis on expanding access to evidence-based substance use disorder treatment, harm reduction services, and overdose prevention measures as the cornerstone of an effective approach. Far too many people who need and want help for problematic substance use are unable to access quality, affordable, and culturally appropriate care, with devastating consequences for individuals, families, and communities.

IMPORTANCE OF EXPANDING ACCESS TO EVIDENCE-BASED SERVICES.

At the J Healthcare Initiative, our goal is to advocate for and facilitate the expansion of science-backed services for individuals at all stages of substance use and recovery. This encompasses various services such as low-threshold outreach, medication-assisted treatments like methadone and buprenorphine, diacetylmorphine and/or stimulants like methylphenidate and dextroamphetamine, psychosocial support, and long-term recovery resources. We are also dedicated to enhancing the availability of harm reduction tools like naloxone, drug checking, and safe consumption spaces to address the rising number of drug-poisoning deaths caused by the unpredictable and deadly unregulated drug supply.

Our surveys and experiences have highlighted the vital importance of involving people who use drugs and their communities as partners in developing effective, trusted, and culturally appropriate services. We support involving affected populations directly in shaping drug policies and interventions that affect them. Prioritizing community-based and peer-led initiatives is crucial for bridging access disparities and ensuring inclusivity. We are encouraging other organizations to meaningfully engage those with direct living/lived experiences.

CHALLENGE 5

HIGH TRANSMISSION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES ASSOCIATED WITH CRIMINALIZED DRUG USE

PROGRESS

The J Healthcare Initiative is encouraged to note the progress reported by non-profit organization actors in some regions in addressing the persistent challenge of high rates of HIV, hepatitis C, and other blood-borne infections among people who use criminalized drugs. These hard-fought gains are a testament to the tireless efforts of harm reduction advocates and service providers worldwide, often in the face of considerable political opposition and resource constraints.

However, we strongly agree with the report's assertion that there remains an urgent need to dramatically expand access to proven harm reduction interventions if we are to turn the tide on this devastating public health crisis. Ample scientific evidence demonstrates that core services like sterile syringe access programs and medication-assisted treatments such as methadone and buprenorphine are highly effective at reducing the transmission of infectious diseases among people who inject drugs. Scaling up these services to full coverage along with addressing prohibitionism has to be the priority.

WHAT WE DO

Recognizing the critical need to educate and empower the future healthcare leaders, the J Healthcare Initiative sponsors experiential learning programs for universities in Canada and the United States. These opportunities allow undergraduate and graduate students to apply their skills to real-world challenges related to drug use. Students that are eligible to be a part of our experiential learning programs are but not limited to; Nursing, health sciences, pre-law, pre-meds and marketing.

Our university chapter program is an extension of our efforts. Chapter directors put in dedicated works to make a lasting impact on their institutions by organizing overdose response training sessions, panel events that bridge academic and community viewpoints on the drug crisis, creating promotional materials on safer drug use in campus and advocating for our cause among students and faculty.

CHALLENGE 6

ADVERSE HEALTH CONSEQUENCES ASSOCIATED WITH NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

The J Healthcare Initiative shares the grave concerns raised in the Global Civil Society Report about the severe health harms associated with the rapid emergence of new psychoactive substances (NPS) in drug markets worldwide. The proliferation of these highly potent synthetic drugs, often deceptively marketed as 'legal highs' or mislabeled as established substances, poses significant risks to the health and well-being of people who use drugs, particularly youth. We strongly concur with the report's emphasis on the urgent need for robust early warning systems to detect and monitor the appearance of new substances in a timely manner. However, we recognize that there is a need for a standardized procedure in NPS reporting and what to include in the open database.

Recognizing the urgent need to catalyze policy change to address this growing crisis, the J Healthcare Initiative has developed a predictive model to estimate the potential number of deaths that could result from the emergence of new NPS under current drug policy frameworks. By utilizing data on the toxicology, pharmacology of known NPS, drug user population as well as trends in substance use patterns and policy responses, our model aims to provide a compelling evidence-based projection of the scale of the threat posed by these substances if decisive action is not taken.

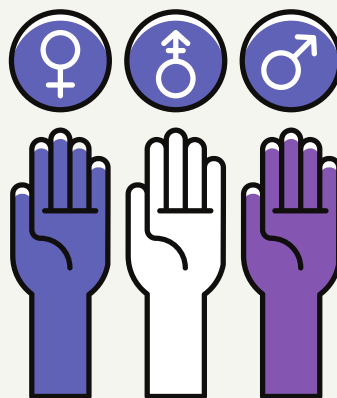
Our predictive modeling approach can serve as a powerful tool for among policymakers, public health officials, and the general public about the critical importance of adopting proactive, person-centered, health-centered strategies to mitigate the risks of NPS.

PROJECTS	DETAILS	OUTCOME
Synthetic Opioid Poisoning Estimation (SOPE)	The formula utilizes statistical modelling to predict synthetic opioid-related deaths across various policy scenarios.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prediction of poisoning fatalities• Alternatives to the current policies
Toxic Drug Crisis Urgency Indicator (TDCUI)	The countdown feature of our model is a visually striking and emotionally impactful way to convey the urgency of the toxic drug poisoning crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Real time data on how long policymakers have left before another fatality occurs

The J Healthcare Initiative strongly endorses the Global Civil Society Report's call for a fundamental reorientation of drug policies towards a framework grounded in public health, human rights, and social justice. For far too long, the dominant approach to drug control has relied on criminalization, punishment and forced rehabilitation, with devastating consequences for the health and well-being of individuals and communities who use drugs.

THE WAY FORWARD

Engaging mothers, sex workers and youths who use drugs



FINDINGS INDICATE THAT PUNITIVE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES THAT FRAME WOMEN WHO USE DRUGS AS UNFIT PARENTS CONTINUE TO NEGATIVELY SHAPE THE LIVES OF WOMEN, MOST SIGNIFICANTLY AMONG INDIGENOUS PARTICIPANTS (BOYD,2022).

We firmly believe that drug policies must be rooted in evidence-based public health principles, prioritizing the reduction of harm, the promotion of health, and the respect for human dignity. This requires a dramatic shift away from the failed "war on drugs" paradigm and towards a compassionate, person-centered approach that accepts the reality that people use drugs and that drug users have the right to healthcare just like everybody else.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The J Healthcare Initiative would like to express our deepest gratitude to the individuals and community organizations who have provided invaluable input and guidance to inform our work. In particular, we extend our heartfelt thanks to: The mothers, youths, and caregivers who use drugs. We thank our peers for being Knowledge Keepers.

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WE THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT IN
OUR INITIATIVES

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