Public health: Union strategy on drugs 2000-2004, prevention and reduction of risks of drug dependence

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PURPOSE : Copuncil Recommendation on reducing the incidence of drug related health damage.
CONTENT : The EU Drugs Strategy (2000-2004), endorsed by the European Council in December 1999, has three main public health targets. The second of these is to reduce substantially over five years the incidence of drug-related health damage (HIV, hepatitis B and C, tuberculosis, etc) and the number of drug-related deaths. The main goal of this recommedation is to facilitate the achievement of this target. According to the annual reports of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), illegal drug use is more concentrated among young adults. Cannabis is the most widely used, with amphetamines and ecstasy in second position, cocaine in an increasing third position and heroin at a broadly stable low level. Prevalence of HIV, hepatitis B and C among injecting drug users appears relatively stable, although the prevalence of hepatitis C infection is high. Risk-reduction measures have been successful in decreasing drug-related deaths and serious health problems. Risk reduction includes needle exchange and other hygienic measures involving drug injecting, substitution treatment, low threshold services, information and counselling on safer use and safer sex, and outreach work. The intensity of risk reduction responses of the Member States appears to differ considerably between countries. Member States with lower availability of risk reduction measures may be at risk for new increases in HIV, and hepatitis B and C transmission. Evaluation is a key tool for improving drug prevention and the reduction of drug dependence associated risks. The EU drugs strategy includes a whole chapter on evaluation and Community and national policies could foster significant advances in this area. This Council Recommendation also supports the development of evidence-based evaluation to increase the efficacy of drug prevention and the reduction of drug related health risks.