



# News release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

HEALTH AND SOCIAL RESPONSES TO DRUG PROBLEMS: A EUROPEAN GUIDE 2021

## **New EMCDDA miniguide on responding to opioid-related deaths highlights approaches and evidence that can help save lives**

(17.12.2021, LISBON) Health and social responses to opioid-related deaths are explored in a new **EMCDDA** miniguide launched today. The resource is the ninth in a series of miniguides, making up the agency's latest overview of actions and interventions to respond to the consequences of illicit drug use <sup>(1)</sup>.

Thousands of lives are lost to drug overdose in Europe every year, but these deaths are preventable. Opioids, such as heroin, are involved in approximately three-quarters of fatal drug overdoses in Europe, often combined with other substances (e.g. stimulants, alcohol). The risk of dying from an opioid overdose increases after periods of abstinence, when tolerance is lost, such as on release from prison or leaving abstinence-based treatment.

Today's miniguide presents the latest scientific evidence for a range of measures to reduce opioid-related deaths. These include interventions geared towards reducing vulnerability, preventing overdoses from occurring and avoiding fatal outcomes:

- **Interventions to reduce vulnerability** — e.g. integrated healthcare, housing and employment programmes and actions to reduce stigma.
- **Interventions to reduce the risk of an overdose occurring** — e.g. overdose awareness training, retention in opioid agonist treatment, ensuring continuity of care on leaving prison.
- **Interventions to reduce fatal outcomes when overdose occurs** — e.g. naloxone training and distribution for professionals and peers, drug consumption facilities.

It is estimated that one in two people who use opioids in Europe receive opioid agonist treatment, although coverage varies widely between nations. Over a third of European countries provide take-home naloxone programmes, while just under a third operate one or more drug consumption facilities. Although around half of European countries report addressing overdose prevention in their national drug strategy, only a limited number have a specific overdose prevention strategy or plan in place.

Considering implications for policy and practice, the miniguide identifies a number of opportunities in this area that can help save lives. These include: improving continuity of care between prison and the community in the first weeks after release (when risks are highest); increasing coverage of opioid agonist treatment; and providing enhanced support to those leaving abstinence-based treatment.

Drawing on a fresh global review of the evidence, and insights from 29 countries (27 EU, Turkey and Norway), the EMCDDA miniguides — which are grouped in four bundles — are designed to support practitioners and policymakers in addressing the consequences of drug use. The resources are presented in a digital and modular format, designed to improve accessibility, to be easier to read across a range of devices and to facilitate regular updates and translations.

Each miniguide provides an overview of the most important aspects to consider when planning or delivering health and social responses to particular drug-related problems. The miniguides review the

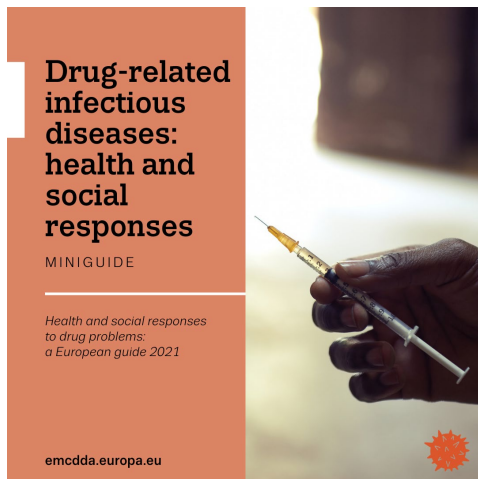
availability and effectiveness of responses and consider implications for policy and practice. Throughout the miniguides, ‘Spotlights’ focus on a number of hot topics requiring special attention today.

*Today’s miniguide is one of two in the second bundle dedicated to drug-related harms. The first bundle, launched on 18 October, focused on responding to specific patterns of drug use. Upcoming bundles in 2022 will focus on settings and vulnerable groups.*

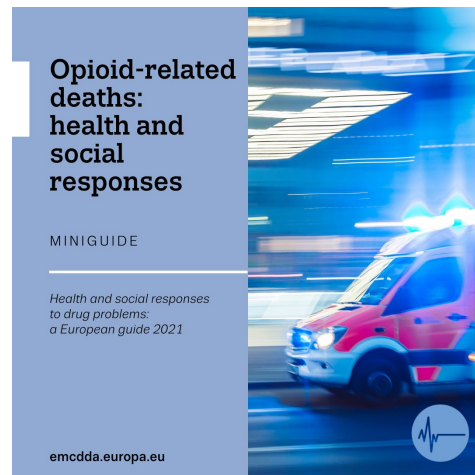
(1) [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/health-and-social-responses-a-european-guide\\_en](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/health-and-social-responses-a-european-guide_en)

**BUNDLE 2: HARMS**

1 December



17 December



The miniguides update and replace the 2017 one-volume *Health and social responses to drug problems: a European guide*.