

# HIV/AIDS and drug use in prison settings: opportunities for prevention

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## Issues

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS and drug use, in most countries worldwide, is much higher among prisoners than among people in the community. Many prisoners have drug related problems and engage in behaviours with high risks for transmission of HIV and other infectious diseases, such as sharing injecting equipment. Rates of HIV/AIDS and drug use are often even higher among female prisoners than among male prisoners.

## Description

Reflecting recognition that prison health is vital to wider public health, the WHO Health in Prisons Project (HIPP) was launched in 1995, initiating an international movement to promote health and tackle health inequalities in prison settings. The HIPP Network for Prison Health currently consists of 39 European countries and a large number of (inter)national organizations. These address prison health system developments and a number of technical issues relating to infectious diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, hepatitis, tuberculosis, and illicit drug use, including substitution therapy and harm reduction measures. Recent activities in the area of HIV/AIDS, other infectious diseases and drug use in prisons have resulted in the Madrid Recommendation, and in the WHO recommendations on the prevention of overdose deaths upon release from prison.

## Lessons learned

Health protection and promotion measures in prisons must be in place, addressing the right of prisoners to equivalent health care as available in the community and recognizing the prison environment as a unique opportunity for interventions. A close link between the prison health service and the public health service is essential.

## Next steps

WHO recommendations on the prevention of overdose deaths upon release from prison and the Madrid Recommendation on Prison Health Protection will be widely disseminated and used as guiding principles to improve prison health globally.

