

# Addiction Services Are Essential Services

## BRIEFING

### 1 BACKGROUND

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Dianova has long experience in addiction treatment and prevention services and for over a decade, the organization has implemented international education and health promotion campaigns not only to disseminate information about the risks associated with drug and alcohol abuse and non-substance addictive behaviours, but also to emphasize the need to end the stigma and discrimination affecting people who use, or have used, drugs.

As emphasized by the **outcome document** of the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016), addiction is a public health issue that can be defined as a chronic, relapsing health disorder characterized by compulsive use of one or more substances despite harmful consequences. This disorder must then be addressed from **health and social perspectives**.

**Target 3.5 of Sustainable Development Goal #3 (Good Health and Well-being)** highlights the need to *“Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.”*

The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought to light important challenges and shortcomings in some of our society’s most essential sectors, including health, education and social protection services (health systems overload, lack of material, human resources, etc.)

The rapid spread of the disease led the World Health Organization to declare it a Public health emergency of international concern on 30 January 2020, based on the impact that the virus could have on least developed countries with less health infrastructures. By that date, the presence of the virus had been confirmed in all provinces of mainland China, and cases were reported in 15 other countries.

On 11 March, the virus was confirmed in more than 100 countries and the disease was characterized as a pandemic by WHO. The number of confirmed cases continued to grow, reaching 500,000 cases worldwide by March 26, 2020.

To prevent the spread of the virus, most governments have imposed travel restrictions, quarantines, as well as social distancing and lockdown measures. The Covid-19 pandemic had, and is still having, devastating effects and has sparked fears of an impending economic crisis and recession. In most countries, the food sector had to face increased demand due to panic-buying and stockpiling. Lastly, there has been widespread online misinformation and conspiracy theories about the virus, and incidents of xenophobia and racism against citizens of China and other East and Southeast Asian countries.

The current public health crisis raises additional serious concerns for the well-being of people who use drugs. There is an urgent **need to ensure the continuity of services for those with substance use disorders, while keeping them, and those in charge of their health and care needs, safe.**

Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres (in his recently released [report on the socio-economic impact of Covid-19](#)) highlighted the important role of civil society and grassroots organizations in the fight against Covid-19 at the local level. **NGOs provide economic and livelihood opportunities, and can adapt responses to the community context.** In some places, NGOs have become the only point of reference for individuals and families during this pandemic.

## 2 SITUATION – POPULATIONS & SERVICES AFFECTED

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### Populations affected

The most vulnerable populations face great challenges in dealing with the pandemic, including people who use drugs or alcohol. According to the [UNODC Global Report 2019](#), the number of people who have used drugs has increased by 30 per cent in the last 10 years. Today, 1 in 18 people aged 15-64 have used drugs in the previous year. In addition, there are an estimated 35 million people suffering from illicit drug use disorders while only 1 in 7 receives treatment. As for the [prevalence of alcohol use disorders](#), it is estimated that they affect about 1.4 per cent of the world population.

The challenges engendered by stay-at-home orders are likely to have had negative effects on people with substance use disorders or in recovery, including increased drug or alcohol consumption, risks of overdose, and relapse. Moreover, as emphasized in a report by the [European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction](#), **people who use drugs face additional risks of infection by Covid-19** as compared to the general population, because of lifestyle factors and pre-existing health problems. Examples of these include: the high prevalence of chronic pulmonary diseases among clients in treatment, and that of HIV, viral hepatitis infections and liver cancers – leading to weakened immune systems – among people who inject drugs.

In addition, the [United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to health](#) pointed out that, in the current Covid-19 context, people who use drugs had to face – or are still facing – specific needs, due to criminalization, stigma, discrimination, social marginalization and higher economic and social vulnerabilities, including a lack of access to adequate housing and healthcare. He then concluded by stressing **the need to recognize vulnerable groups of people who use drugs as a high-risk population in order to mitigate the spread of the pandemic.**

Lastly, while about one third of all people who use drugs are estimated to be women, the latter are consistently reported to be at higher risk of HIV and other infections and [more at risk of experiencing intimate partner violence](#) than women in the broader population. This phenomenon is also likely to be exacerbated in these times of crisis.

Other mental health problems are also widespread: it is estimated that [one in four people in the world](#) will be affected by mental health disorders at some point in their lives placing such disorders among the

leading causes of ill health and disability worldwide. This situation seems to have been worsened by the pandemic: lockdown measures and resulting economic downturn have negatively affected many people's mental health and created new barriers for people already suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders.

## Services affected

Substance use disorders are life-threatening conditions and addiction prevention, treatment, reintegration, and harm reduction services, are needed more than ever. In the midst of a crisis of this proportion, the Dianova network's addiction counsellors have, as most other addiction professionals, carried on with their mission and daily tasks dutifully, multiplying preventive protection actions. Dianova's therapeutic communities and other addiction services healthcare facilities have taken very strict precautions to keep their beneficiaries and staff safe, whether by suspending new admissions or by limiting them to thoroughly screened or quarantined patients. Everywhere, Covid-19 prevention procedures have been put into play, all staff members remaining vigilant and duly following essential health and safety protocols and physical distancing measures.

**Yet, in many countries, authorities have been able to give addiction services only very little support.** In some cases, health systems initially thought of as solid have been unable to provide professionals with basic personal protection equipment or financial support to buy it. Still, addiction professionals have been carrying out their duties with integrity despite difficult and often dangerous circumstances, providing vulnerable people with appropriate counselling and support. They kept on working.

## 3 THE CAMPAIGN

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In order to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, on June 26, Dianova would also like to pay warm tribute to the hard work, dedication, and innovative attitudes of all addiction professionals in these times of doubt and emergency.

Starting from June 16, Dianova will launch **an international advocacy campaign to raise awareness of the necessity that addiction services be on par with other health services and that they be given similar levels of attention and support.** Should another crisis of this nature arise, addiction services shouldn't be the poor relation of the public health system any longer. **Substance use and other addictive disorders are a matter of public health and addiction services should therefore be considered as essential.** This campaign will target decision makers, health professionals, the media, and the general public.

The campaign's motto, *"When everything is on pause, some of us must go on"*, will be a reminder that all healthcare workers have been exemplary in their handling of the pandemic, including professionals in addiction services healthcare facilities. Just one among many lessons, this pandemic is teaching us the pressing need to reaffirm and uphold the universal Right to Health, **leaving no one behind.**

**The campaign's page on Dianova's web site:**

<https://www.dianova.org/campaigns/addiction-services-are-essential-services/>

## 4 AIMS & STRATEGY

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The aim of the campaign is to increase public awareness and mobilization to recognize addiction treatment and prevention services as essential and to recognize the frontline role of social health professionals working in this field to support particularly vulnerable groups, as shown by the Covid-19 crisis.

The campaign will be two-fold:

- Communication with target audiences through various platforms and channels with the objective of promoting the campaign's core message, action and expected behaviour change;
- Communication to maintain and strengthen Dianova's reputation and trust, and to get stakeholders to support the organization.

## 5 CREATIVE CONCEPT

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One of the most critical consequences of the outbreak of Covid-19 is that **some of the resources dedicated to provide solutions to other important problems of society could be interrupted** due to lack of investment and resources. Substance use and other addiction disorders are one of these problems and people affected by them, whom Dianova has been supporting for many years, have often been left behind.

Although it seems that everything has been put on hold during the pandemic, health professionals have kept on fulfilling their mission, and among them the professional teams in Dianova's addiction healthcare facilities. The organization's beneficiaries have also been committed to pursuing their treatment programme throughout the crisis, because dropping out would have given rise to other problems, potentially impacting our society as a whole.

This is why we need to raise our voices, **to demand that addiction services be on a par with other essential health care services and that they be provided with similar levels of care and support.**

To convey these messages, we will use the *cinemagrah* technique, i.e. animated gif images. This technique will help us convey two main concepts:

1. **When everything is on pause** (part of the image is motionless)
2. **Some of us must go on** (another part of the image is in motion while the rest is on pause)

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*Substance use and other addictive disorders are a public health issue*

## *Addiction Services are essential*

### **6 DEFINITION OF TARGETS**

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Target audiences and expected changes/actions

- *Decision makers* –
  - Should acknowledge the need to support addiction treatment services
  - Should advocate the integration of addiction-related issues to public health agendas
  - Should provide treatment services with sufficient resources; during the pandemic, many of these services did not receive the support they needed
- *Potential donors* – call to action to raise resources to support addiction treatment services.
- *Health professionals (addiction sector)* –
  - Should join this challenge and take personal or group action
  - **Should be made more aware of how vital addiction prevention and treatment services are** in a comprehensive perspective of health, as defined by WHO
  - Should develop tools to continue helping people during times of crisis (digital and other tools) – **many people with substance use disorders were unable to access the support they crucially needed** during the pandemic.
- *General public* – should join and support the campaign

Each participant will have to select one or more targets depending on their local context.

### **7 MATERIALS & RESOURCES**

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All communication materials will be available for download on a dedicated page on the Dianova International website.

#### **Statement**

A statement by Dianova will be published on our web site including the organization's position and recommendations. This statement will urge decision makers to recognize that addiction services are entrusted with the crucial task of providing support to people suffering from addiction problems and that they therefore are essential services.

#### **Social Media Kit**

A social media kit will be provided to help disseminate the campaign in social networks, including various messages for each target. The social media kit will also be available for download on Dianova's web site along with the campaign's other material.

### **Editorial content**

- 2 press releases
- 5 web articles
- Reports, data, good practices

### **Digital contents**

Hashtag: **#AddictionServicesAreEssential**

We will also use as a secondary hashtag #WorldDrugDay during the week from June 22 to 26

*Cinemagraph:*

- 7 *cinemagraph* images
- Adaptation to different media

## **8 EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES**

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Dianova International will provide a template for data collection.

Online Communications. KPIs

- Size: number of posts, emails, tweets, number of web views,
- Vitality: scope, number of people impacted
- Influence: number of interactions, likes, shares, comments, retweets

Fundraising - Potential donors

- Number of contacts made
- Number of successful collaborations/contributions
- Overall impact (number of people impacted) of participations/contributions obtained
- Funds collected and non-monetary contributions