

The Intervention of the American Drug Policy Coalition (CAPD)

in the “Dialogue of the Heads of Delegation, the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretary General, Representatives of Civil Society Organisations, Workers, the Private Sector and other Social Actors”

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“Facing COVID-19 challenges in the hemisphere: a collaborative approach to highlight vulnerabilities and to demonstrate resilience in times of crisis operating on four pillars of the OAS”.

A significant lesson learnt from this pandemic was the central role that frontline health workers play in ensuring the continuity of health services provision. However, in many countries, problematic substance use services’ workers have not been prioritized, by limiting their working conditions and the services provided.

We argue that the crisis shaped by the pandemic is no excuse to neglect the needs of people in a problematic substance use situation. To overcome this crisis by highlighting vulnerabilities and demonstrating resilience on a national and at hemispherical level, we urge the Member States to:

- **Address substance use disorder related-issues from a public health perspective.** We request that the services which address substance use disorder related-issues be **deemed essential** and comparable to other public health services.
- **Ensure services continuity and quality and provide sufficient resources.** Restriction on movement, lack of personal equipment protection supply (PPE), not considering health professionals deem essential to respond to COVID-19 pandemic, among other things, have left thousands of people without access to consumption services. Also, the services provided by volunteers or the civil society have been more proportionately affected during the pandemic for not being always fully integrated with health national systems. We request that the services continuity be preserved, by maintaining their level of quality, professionalism and financing.
- **Monitor and evaluate initiatives caused by this pandemic.** The restrictions imposed by the pandemic resulted in the implementation of new security, treatment and admission protocols in the service provision. The resilience and creativity in the services providers’ response have been evident, including greater flexibility prescriptions and greater use of telemedicine, and also

the communities themselves, with innovative initiatives to reach people most at risk. We call for the implementation of evaluating and monitoring systems to guarantee the safety of new measures, to evaluate the changes in the access to medicines and to modify them according to the evidence.

- **Guarantee treatment in prison environments.** To reduce the overcrowding caused by this pandemic, we call for an increase in alternative measures to sentencing and imprisonment for drug-related offences. We call for more resources to be invested in treatment, education and rehabilitation from a continuous, gender-sensitive perspective.
- **Guarantee respect for human rights with all the actions undertaken.** We request the United Nations **International Guidelines on Human Rights and Drug Policy** be considered, which in accordance with international law, including the instruments of the Inter-American System, summarizes the specific legal obligations of the States in this area.

Finally, knowing that Civil Society plays a vital role in guaranteeing the right to health care, especially during this pandemic, we urge the OAS Member States to **maintain open spaces for dialogue in the CICAD** and include the **Inter-American Commission on Human Rights**, based on the coherence of the Inter-American system.

Many thanks.