

Harm reduction work in Switzerland: which direction to take?

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Is today's world the same as it was yesterday?

From an AIDS policy to a drug policy...

On the national level, the disparities between cantons are more and more sorely felt, despite the four-pillar policy and the so-called cube model, a 3D frame of reference considering addiction type, addiction intensity, and holistic approaches. This is particularly the case in the French-speaking part of Switzerland where the harm reduction pillar is by far not legitimized in all the cantons.

What role can the actors in this field play in order to formulate public health policies in the area of drug addiction? How can harm reduction activities find cohesion among all the cantons?

From health emergency to social emergency...

The paradigms of harm reduction do have to develop further and take into account the current stakes, which are no longer exclusively health-related. Hence, some of the job requirements that were elaborated 10 or even 20 years ago do not match any longer the needs of drug users because their profiles as well as the modes and types of addiction have largely evolved since then.

Harm reduction has to pursue its course in order to limit the negative consequences on so-called problematic drug users, without neglecting those who use drugs in a recreational manner. Furthermore, the drug user's environment is also an important parameter to consider. Drug user's needs affect health determinants, which a lot of international declarations stated to be the key issue to be addressed, for the sake of a better well-being of citizens at risk – like drug users (housing, work, social ties).

The golden years of harm reduction are over, but major challenges do remain, which will have to be tackled in close collaboration with the other actors involved in the policy of four pillars, i.e. prevention, therapy, and repression. They will also have to develop their policies and professional practices.