

FACT SHEETS

Harm Reduction: Public Health and Public Order

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Evidence has shown that harm reduction services such as medication-assisted treatment, needle exchange, and safer injection facilities improve the health of drug users without increasing drug use. Yet in many countries, policymakers and the public wrongly believe that offering harm reduction services encourages crime. Numerous studies by international organizations, national governments, and public health institutions around the world have shown that harm reduction neither increases crime nor erodes public order. Indeed, harm reduction in the form of medication-assisted treatment has been shown to decrease criminal activities by illicit drug users.

This fact sheet, produced by the OSI International Harm Reduction Development Program, demonstrates that medication-assisted treatment and needle exchange are lifesaving measures that do not increase crime or public disturbances. Medication-assisted treatment improves public safety by reducing the illicit drug dependence that can lead to theft and other crimes. Harm reduction programs are an effective, practical, and humane way of improving the health of both drug users and communities.

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