

LAUNCHING PEER-BASED HARM REDUCTION PROGRAMS IN THE PENITENTIARY SYSTEM - EXPERIENCE OF UKRAINE.

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Background

Freezone piloted first needle-exchange point in Odessa penitentiary in 2023. According to the pre-pilot research more than 50% of all those convicted had drug-using experience and more than 40% wished to have a full package of Harm Reduction in their institution. Since then, Freezone covered with needle-exchange and Substitution Treatment programs 4 penitentiary institutions (prisons) and managed to institutionalize Harm Reduction programs into the daily routine of penitentiary system.

Approach

Freezone's key approach is peer-driven intervention. In each setting we hire, train and monitor community outreachers's teams. Community-based approach is vital for building trust and making sure our services are provided 24/7. Each outreachers receives training on Harm Reduction and is provided with individual contract for service provision. In each setting there is a multi-disciplinary team of outreach workers and healthcare personnel that allows flexibility, sustainability and mentoring. Inter-departmental meetings are provided on regular basis for effective coordination and problem solving.

Analysis

During 2025 our peer outreachers provided 13566 services that included consultations on safer injecting (including participation in needle-exchange program), consultations on preventing overdose, blood-borne infections and negative consequences of poly-drug use. More than 803 prisoners became regular clients of our HR programs. Our outreach teams are equipped with planchets that allows them to operatively run database and ensure effective program monitoring.

Conclusion

Freezone is developing its certified HR course and HR toolkit for peers to be used to ensure smooth scaling up of HR programs to other prison settings. Our next objective is to ensure access of HR programs to pre-trial detention settings and establish continuity of care for clients using psychoactive substances.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The conference collaborators recognise the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.