

Meaningful Inclusion of People Who Use Drugs at ICASA



UHRN Position Paper

The International Conference on AIDS and Sexually transmitted infections in Africa (ICASA) is a major international AIDS conference which takes place in Africa.

The International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa offers a unique platform for **Leaders, Activists, Scientists and Community** to take stock of the challenges faced in achieving the global targets and pave the way for an efficient innovation towards a generation without AIDS in Africa and to assess and improve the global frame work for ending AIDS by 2030.

The Challenge:

People who inject drugs (also known as PWID) are among the groups most vulnerable to HIV infection. It is estimated that people who inject drugs are **22 times more likely to acquire HIV** than among the rest of the population. Drug use now accounts for an ever-growing proportion of those living with HIV. On average **one in ten new HIV infections are caused by the sharing of needles**. Moreover, it is estimated that **25% of new infections** outside of sub-Saharan Africa are among injecting drug users. It is thought that there are approximately 11.8 million people who inject drugs worldwide, and **13.1% of them** are thought to be living with HIV.

Despite the increased risk of HIV for people who inject drugs they are among those with the least access to HIV prevention, treatment and healthcare.

It is evidently clear that the past ICASA platforms have not given visibility to people who use and inject drugs and the conversations about people who use drugs have been limited. During the last ICASA conference, under the theme 'Africa's AIDS response: The race to 2030 – Evidence, Scale Up, Accelerate' held in Durban, South Africa in early December there was a visibly low representation of people who use drugs (PWUD), with only 3 side events about PWUD, and only 6 poster presentations – which is not enough representation given the statistics mentioned above and evidenced need for scaling up of services for people who use and inject drugs.

If one of the most vulnerable populations to contradicting HIV is not even well represented at such an International Conference, how can we expect to end AIDS by 2030?

Calls to Action:

Government of Uganda through Uganda AIDS Commission with its mandate to coordinate HIV interventions in Uganda should ensure coordinated harm reduction interventions and activities in preparation for ICASA by ensuring that the PWUD networks the community, health workers participates in submission of abstracts, posters and presentations on drug use for ICASA.



We call on **ICASA** to ensure more representation from networks of people who use drugs including creating an enabling and supportive environment for more presentation on drug use, representation of people who use drugs on ICASA committees, considering a theme or sub-theme on people who use drugs, increasing support for people who use drugs with scholarships, creating special sessions for people who use drugs.



We call on **Civil Society Organisations** to increase and strengthen capacity of networks of people who use drugs to participate in ICASA through the community village, presentation of posters, abstracts among others.

To ensure increased research and documentation on drug use as well as scaling up models on programming for people who use drugs (best practices).

To scale up advocacy for people who use drugs in various platforms including within the donor community, like minded national organisations, and academia.

For the next ICASA, Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN) together with her allies and partners would like ICASA secretariat, partners, CSO representatives and the government to push for harm reduction to make it to the top of the ICASA agenda; for the rights and wellbeing of people who use drugs to make it to the top of the agenda. Supported by data, research and the wealth of experience of the communities that we belong to and stand in solidarity with, we know that we cannot be successful in achieving an Africa free from AIDS if we continue down the path of neglect and complacency.



We cannot afford another conference in which people who use drugs and harm reduction are not central to the discussion.

About UHRN

The Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN) is a national network for people who use drugs that exists to champion and coordinate people who use drugs' health (HIV, TB, Hepatitis & STI), advocacy and harm reduction programmes to respond to the drug use crisis in Uganda. The network provides a country-wide systematic and inclusive coordination structure for over 30 grassroots drug user led and serving CBOs spread across the country.

UHRN envisions a healthy and productive society of PWUD in Uganda, with a mission to improve the health, human rights and socio-economic well-being of people who use drugs through leadership building, collaboration and capacity enhancement to uphold harm reduction interventions in Uganda.

On behalf of the community of people who use drugs in all their diversities in Uganda.

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UGANDA HARM REDUCTION NETWORK (UHRN)

"Our Lives begin to End the Day we Become Silent About things that Concerns Us"