

Quarterly Newsletter

Uganda Harm Reduction Network

COMMUNICATION FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear reader,

Greetings from Uganda Harm Reduction Network (UHRN).



We are excited to bring to you our quarterly newsletter which is dedicated to informing you about the strides UHRN has made in their effort to provide services to people who use drugs (PWUDs) in Uganda. In this newsletter we highlight some of the key events that happened in 2021 as well as in the first quarter of 2022. We hope you will find this useful and informative.

UHRN has continued to make tremendous efforts towards addressing the issues affecting PWUDs in Uganda through various Harm reduction interventions amidst the challenges created by Covid 19.

It's my pleasure to introduce to you some of the significant achievements UHRN has made. Amongst them include the scaling up of the harm reduction interventions in the Teso, Lango and Karamoja regions of Uganda, the integration of social economic empowerment into harm reduction programming that has supported skilling up of PWUDs as a way of preparing them for integration into the community. And lastly the adoption of the diversion strategy by the law enforcement officers as an alternative for incarceration among PWUDs rather than incarceration.

In UHRN's efforts to increase accessibility to Medically Assisted Therapy (MAT) services for PWUDs in Kampala and surrounding areas, UHRN in collaboration with the Makerere School of Public Health and Medical School of Wisconsin is in the processes of rolling out the community dispensing of buprenorphine at the Drop-in Center (DiC). In addition, UHRN in collaboration with M.O.H and Butabika Hospital is rolling out a Mobile Van Dispensing Model of service delivery for clients on MAT. We believe with this we will have increased access to the MAT programme for MAT clients as well as support client's recovery.

All these efforts have been made possible with contribution from our different partners, harm reduction advocates, like minded civil society organizations, donors and the community of people who used drugs among others. We are grateful for your continuous support.

Sincerely,
Wamala Twaibu
Executive Director

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UHRN'S DROP IN CENTER (DIC)

UHRN's Drop in Center (DiC) is a safe space which provides accessible services to the community of people who use and inject drugs in Uganda.

Harm reduction services offered at the UHRN - DiC

primary services

- Risk reduction Counselling
- targeted HIV testing services
- Routine STI screening
- Routine TB screening
- SGBV screening
- Screening for Opioid substitution therapy (OST)

Secondary services

- PrEP
- Post -violence care
- Art adherence support
- Alcohol /drug harm reduction
- TB treatment
- Hepatitis Treatment
- Viral Load and other Monitoring &investigative test.
- Methadone and other medical assisted therapies(MAT)
- Needle & syringe program
- Buprenorphine & Naloxone naltrexone
- Condom, Lubricant distribution
- Referrals (HTS ,VMMC,ART)
- Stigma & discrimination reduction capacity building.



LOOKING BACK AT 2021

- UHRN conducted orientation training for 40 harm reduction network partners and PWUD community.
- 85 law enforcement officers were oriented in the implementation of the probation and diversion strategy as an alternative to PWUD incarceration and other punitive approaches to drug use.
- UHRN Conducted a National Harm Reduction Community Summit (HRCS) deemed Building Bridges for Advocacy (BBA) as an initiative to advance national advocacy efforts for drug policy and harm reduction, for 40 advocates.
- UHRN in collaboration with Makerere University school of population studies launched a research report on drug use among boda boda cyclists in the divisions of Kampala.
- In collaboration with Harm Reduction International, Uganda Harm Reduction Network disseminated the assessment report for the Rapid Assessment of Harm Reduction Funding and Investment in Uganda.



Expanding our Team

During turbulent times coming in and out of COVID-19 lockdowns, as many organizations were having to lose staff due to budget cuts, we managed to retain all staff and even added 4 members to our team.



Ismail Mutebe - TB contact tracing officer



Hope Atim - Communications & Advocacy Officer



Joanna Namigadde - Finance Assistant



Sandra Kemirimo - Clinician

Christmas at UHRN

On UHRN's final day at the office we celebrated Christmas amongst the staff with gift exchanges.



LOOKING INTO 2022

In January 2022, we conducted our Annual General Meeting (AGM), with the objective of wrapping up 2021 through the sharing of the annual report. Stakeholders, community members and staff were in attendance.



On the 5th of January, a follow-up discussion was held to operationalize the mobile van dispensing model in which MAT services will be brought closer to PWUID around Kampala. The objective was to discuss issues surrounding this initiative while sharing experience from Nairobi where this initiative is ongoing so that Uganda can learn from their experience.

UHRN conducted a covid-19 vaccination exercise at its Drop in Center (DiC) for staff, clients and other community members. The first vaccine was given in December and the second in January, those who were already vaccinated were also provided with boosters.



We have set up a new Drop in Center (DIC) in Mutungo, Nakawa Division, Kampala District to bring our harm reduction services closer to people who use drugs in the area. This DIC will be supporting PWUID through Medically Assisted Therapy (MAT). MAT is a treatment for persons with opioid use disorder in which PWUID are prescribed medication daily under medical supervision supported by psychosocial interventions.





UHRN held a Breakfast Meeting , to share the Global Drug Policy Index report and how Uganda scored. Action points were taken from the meeting on how to improve Uganda's score in the next Iteration of the Index, and the significance of this Index was understood.

DIC community score card assessment meeting was conducted by IDI to assess the quality and availability of services, staffing and the functionality of the structures and systems at UHRN's DIC. In attendance were UHRN's DIC staffs, LC, DIC committee, workers and the PWID community representatives.



A Post ICASA engagement meeting with community members to share lessons learnt and experiences from the last ICASA meeting and suggest Recommendations for the next ICASA conference was conducted . A position paper was developed to inform the stakeholder's on how they can make ICASA conference more accessible for PWUIDs



UHRN ran a Consultative Workshop for the Development of Harm Reduction Resource Mobilisation Engagement Plan. Members from partner organizations and the Ministry of Health were in attendance, and participated throughout. UHRNs new 5-Year Strategic Plan was shared, there was a presentation from Harm Reduction International on the Global Funding for Harm Reduction situation, and a fruitful discussion was held about the funding gaps in harm reduction in Uganda, and brainstorming on how to access more funding.

UHRN rolled out a Resilience Systems Strengthening project funded by Global Fund through TASO aimed at community systems strengthening in Lango, Teso and Karamoja region with a goal of supporting HIV and TB reduction strategies. UHRN has signed Memorandum of Understanding with Lira, Dokolo, Amolator, Abim and Kotido districts.



UHRN, started an economic empowerment for PWUDs integration project. The integration of economic empowerment into harm reduction programming has supported skilling up of PWUDs as a way of preparing them for integration into the community.

UHRN in partnership with Uganda AIDS Commission, M.O.H, IDI, among others conducted a learning visit to Nairobi-Kenya to learn best practices in the implementation of MAT, challenges and the potential solutions that will inform the roll out of Mobile Van Dispensing in Uganda.



WHAT'S NEXT FOR UHRN IN QUARTER 2

- Support don't punish campaign
- Dissemination of the Harm reduction resource mobilization strategy and engagement plan
- Dialogue for creating awareness on HIV, TB and Malaria for improved HIV treatment adherence.
- Advocacy skills training for CSOs and CBOs within Lango and Karamoja Regions.
- Media engagement -Radio talk shows

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank our donors: Global Fund/TASO, CDC /PEPFER, NIH, OSIEA, ARASA, UHAI, UNAIDS, Harm Reduction International, Youth RISE.

We also thank our CDC implementing partners: IDI, Mild May Uganda, RHSP and the Makerere University School of Public Health and Makerere School of Population Studies.

Special thanks also to the GoU, MoH, Uganda AIDS Commission, MAT Task Force Team, the district local governments, Anti Narcotic Department of Police.

