

START THE HEALING

PRIMER

#WeTheFuturePH



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ABOUT THIS PRIMER



This primer is designed to clarify the drug problem in the Philippines and to present an action plan.

Read on to understand the unfolding narrative from the statistics down to the solutions.



UNDERSTANDING THE DRUG PROBLEM NARRATIVE IN THE PHILIPPINES

When President Rodrigo Duterte assumed office in 2016, he mainstreamed the narrative of drug abuse and the drug trade in the Filipino public imagination. He framed these as issues that can be solved by law enforcement. This became his justification for authorizing the Philippine National Police (PNP) to use whatever means and force necessary to put an end to the so-called Drug Problem brought about by — according to him — drug-users and drug-pushers in the Philippines.

HERE ARE SOME QUICK FACTS ABOUT THE DRUG WAR CAMPAIGN:

The Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB) says there are about 1.8 million current drug users in the Philippines, while 4.8 million Filipinos say they have used illegal drugs at least once in their lives.

Out of all drug users there are:

- more than three-quarters are adults (91%), males (87%),
- have reached high school (80%)
- Over two-thirds (67%) are employed

The most common drug in the Philippines is “shabu” or “poor man’s cocaine” which is a form of methamphetamine. According to a United Nations 2012 report, the Philippines had the highest use of methamphetamine in East Asia, wherein 2.2% of Filipinos ages 16-64 years were methamphetamine users.

The tally for “drug addicts” is way more than it actually is, as it is used to define even those who used drugs only once in their lifetime. This tells us that the term “drug addict” is being used very loosely as well as to justify thousands of deaths, including those who have sought drug-rehabilitation or other treatments.

PCol. Romeo Caramat, acting director of PNP Drug Enforcement Group, admitted in a 2019 Reuters interview that the ‘drug supply is still rampant’ in the country. In addition, Duterte even admitted publicly that the drug problem continues to worsen and he is unable to put a stop to it, a campaign promise he failed to fulfill. Ultimately it is still ineffective in curbing drug use, drug addiction and the drug trade. This has happened before in other countries like in the US and history is a testament that this approach does not address the root cause of the problem.

MYTHBUSTING THE DRUG PROBLEM

Disinformation online and onground have made it hard to debunk the lies around drug use, and this is why we need to be informed with the proper facts and evidence. Learning how to fact-check and verify information is one way we can protect ourselves. Let's start with a list of myths to debunk:

MYTH

Substance abuse and addiction are the same thing.

Substance abuse is the misuse of drugs or alcohol in unhealthy and/or dangerous amounts while drug addiction is the physical, chemical, and/or psychological dependence on drugs or

People who can't stop using drugs are weak or immoral.

One's genetics can affect when a person is more susceptible to addiction disorders. People with existing mental health conditions may also self-medicate by misusing drugs.

Substance abuse is only a problem for lower income or socio-economic groups in society.

When people consume drugs for the first time, specific areas in the brain, called the reward circuit, are activated to release euphoric feelings. Over time the "cells" in the reward circuit become less available as the person seeks more drugs to chase the same euphoria. It will be harder for them to stop and eventually cannot function without the substance.

If you want to, you can get clean whenever you want.

All addicts are the same.

Criminals, homelessness, and a lower socioeconomic standing in life are what come to mind when we think of addiction. In reality, most people who struggle with addiction would be considered "high-functioning." These are people who, on the outside, seem to manage well in their daily lives.

An addict will always be an addict.

Present treatments take special focus on the parts of the brain damaged from prolonged abuse of substances. Along with that, treatments also teach healthy coping skills to living life and how to reframe and challenge unhealthy thoughts, patterns, and situations that may have led to the addiction.

Substance Abuse Programs don't work



FACTS

"Abuse" and "addiction" are often interchanged, but they actually mean different things.

People who become dependent on drugs or alcohol are victims of real illness.

Certain genders, ages, or socio-economic groups may be more vulnerable to substance abuse, but substance abuse and addiction are societal issues that impact every layer of society.

Addiction is a disease.

Most stereotypes about addiction come from misinformation.

Addiction is a "chronic condition" and like any other chronic condition can be treated and managed.

Studies show that Substance Abuse Programs and continued treatments can help a person to completely stop using drugs and have a better quality of life.

WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

Harm Reduction follows a human rights-based approach to create positive changes for people who use drugs and society at large. It aims to minimize the negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with drug use. There is no judgement, coercion, discrimination, or a rigid requirement to stop the use of drugs and it follows these key principles:

1. RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

People who use drugs are treated with compassion and dignity. They are entitled to their human rights, the highest possible standard of health, social services, privacy, and freedom from arbitrary arrests, cruelty, and other forms of dehumanization.

2. COMMITMENT TO EVIDENCE

Harm reduction is backed by scientific evidence showing treatments are practical, safe, and cost-effective across different social, cultural, and economic contexts. Most treatments are easy to implement and have big positive impacts on individual and community health.

3. COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COLLABORATION WITH NETWORKS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS

Harm reduction believes everyone deserves access to healthcare and social services regardless of race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, work, or economic status. The design of policies and practices recognizes that we need to update illogical barriers and rules to make services more accessible, putting the real interests of the people at the center.

4. AVOIDING STIGMA

Practitioners of harm reduction meet the people where they are without judgement. It's important to communicate with respect and avoid stigmatizing language that perpetuates unhelpful stereotypes.

Source: <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a theory of justice that aims to repair harm caused by criminal behavior. It places emphasis on cooperation among all those involved to accomplish transformation of individuals, relationships, and communities. The key principles are the following:

1. JUSTICE SHOULD FOCUS ON REPAIRING HARM CAUSED BY CRIME.
2. THE MOST AFFECTED BY CRIMES SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN SEEKING JUSTICE.
3. THE GOVERNMENT'S JOB IS TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND PRESERVE THE COMMUNITY.



DECRIMINALIZATION

To “decriminalize” means to remove criminal penalties for certain acts that were considered illegal. In this case, decriminalizing drug use will remove or lower criminal penalties for people caught possessing illegal drugs. This approach diverts drug abuse from a criminal act to a public health issue. Doing this will have a more positive effect on the police-community relationship and will alleviate the numbers of people entering the criminal justice system.

PORTUGAL ADOPTED DECRIMINALIZATION AS A NATIONAL -LEVEL STRATEGY IN 2001, AND MORE THAN A DECADE LATER, IT SHOWED PROMISING RESULTS:

Portugal's drug use rates remain below Europe's average.

Deaths from drug overdose dropped from 80 in 2001 to only 16 in 2012.

The rate of people arrested and sent to criminal courts declined annually by more than 60%.

The percentage of people sent to prison in Portugal for drug law violations decreased from 44% in 1999 to 24% in 2013.

Sources:
<https://drugpolicy.org/issues/drug-decriminalization>
<https://time.com/longform/portugal-drug-use-decriminalization/?fbclid=IwAR0RFRMDdx0SB5KWLamLMh59aMvBTzj5HgXNbEbKJran2D51h6xQjUUFY58>

THE PHILIPPINES HAS A HARM REDUCTION ACT IN QUEUE

The Philippines has a Harm Reduction Act in Queue “House Bill No 162: An Act Establishing a National Center and an Inter-Agency Council for Harm Reduction, Providing for Harm Reduction Program for Personal Use and Low-Level Possession of Drugs, Appropriating Funds Therefor and for Other Purposes”

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE BILL IS PASSED?

1. There will be a National Center for Harm Reduction and an Inter-Agency Council for Harm Reduction will be established.
2. Harm reduction will be mainstreamed in public policy, plans, and programs of various sectors and government agencies.
3. There will be a diversion program for drug use and low-level possession of drugs.
4. Discriminatory and harmful drug-related interventions and practices will be prohibited.

ANOTHER BILL IN THE WORKS: PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTION FOR DRUG USE ACT OF 2017



“An Act Mainstreaming the Public Health Approach to Philippine Drug Policy, Establishing and Implementing Community-Based Programs and Strategies for Drug-Related Issues and Concerns, and Prohibiting Harmful and Discriminatory Interventions and Practices, Appropriating Funds Therefor, and for Other Purposes”

This bill seeks to “explore alternatives beyond Oplan Tokhang and compulsory rehabilitation. We should shift our policy from punishment to treatment”, citing that the public health approach has been adopted in different countries like “Vietnam, Malaysia, France, Australia, Hong Kong, China, Iran, Portugal, Czech Republic, The Netherlands, Switzerland, the United States, Thailand, Myanmar, among others.”

Source: <http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/2534421846!.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0kmWwni4FAj8RZ7I8ZOzgfVy6V9RfiSQPfiURJyqhELrP3e1SkH75K41A>
<https://world.time.com/2012/10/09/how-latin-america-may-lead-the-world-in-decriminalizing-drug-use/>

WHAT CAN WE DO?

SUPPORT THE HARM REDUCTION ACT

DOWNLOAD THE PRIMER

Do you agree that we need an alternative solution?

Download and read this in-depth narrative that builds the case for a human rights-centered approach to the drug problem.



SHARE THIS CAMPAIGN AND EXPAND THE CONVERSATION

Share this campaign to your friends, family members, and members of your immediate community. For meaningful change to happen, we must have a clear vision of the more effective solutions to drug issues and ways to achieve it.

JOIN THE DEMAND FOR BETTER POLICIES

Ask your local representatives to support the Harm Reduction Act.

In 2022 elections, vote for candidates who genuinely support harm reduction as policy. Join organizations and groups that advocate for harm reduction approaches. Join this visual petition by Support. Don't Punish, a global advocacy campaign for harm reduction interventions. Click here to read more.

Sign this petition to amplify the call for Harm Reduction Now along with 26 civil society organizations in the Philippines.



CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**HARM REDUCTION
INTERNATIONAL**

<https://www.hri.global/>

SUPPORT DON'T PUNISH

<https://supportdontpunish.org/>

RELEASE

<https://www.release.org.uk/>

**UNITED NATIONS OFFICE
ON DRUGS AND CRIME**

<https://www.unodc.org/>

DRUG LAW REFORM

[https://idpc.net/theme/
drug-law-reform](https://idpc.net/theme/drug-law-reform)

**THE SEARCH FOR HUMANE, EFFECTIVE,
AND EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS
TO THE DRUG PROBLEM**

[https://drugarchive.ph/post/90-the-search-for-humane-
effective-and-evidence-based-solutions-to-the-drug-pr
oblem](https://drugarchive.ph/post/90-the-search-for-humane-effective-and-evidence-based-solutions-to-the-drug-problem)

HARM REDUCTION ACT OF 2016

[https://www.congress.gov.ph/legisdocs/basic_17/HB05
567.pdf](https://www.congress.gov.ph/legisdocs/basic_17/HB05567.pdf)

**THE SEARCH FOR HUMANE, EFFECTIVE,
AND EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS
TO THE DRUG PROBLEM**

[https://drugarchive.ph/post/90-the-search-for-humane-
effective-and-evidence-based-solutions-to-the-drug-pr
oblem](https://drugarchive.ph/post/90-the-search-for-humane-effective-and-evidence-based-solutions-to-the-drug-problem)

**PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTION
FOR DRUG USE ACT OF 2017**

<http://legacy.senate.gov.ph/lisdata/2534421846!.pdf>

**REDUCING THE STIGMA OF SUBSTANCE
USE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

[https://idpc.net/alerts/2021/05/reducing-the-stigma-of-
substance-abuse](https://idpc.net/alerts/2021/05/reducing-the-stigma-of-substance-abuse)

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CHECK OUT THESE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

THE STARTLING OPTIMISM OF HARM REDUCTIONISTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

<https://filtermag.org/harm-reduction-philippines/>

WE MUST DIVEST FROM THE FAILED DRUG WAR LOCALLY, NATIONALLY AND GLOBALLY

<https://filtermag.org/divest-drug-war-globally/>

FIGHTING FOR COMPASSION IN THE PHILIPPINES' BRUTAL DRUG WAR

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/fighting-for-compassion-in-the-philippines-brutal-drug-war/>

DRUG DECRIMINALIZATION IN PORTUGAL: A HEALTH-CENTERED APPROACH

https://drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA_Fact_Sheet_Portugal_Decriminalization_Feb2015.pdf

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