

Recovery and Social Reintegration

Recovery is a process of change that help individuals improve their own health and wellness, moving from substance use towards a drug free life, as well as strive to achieve their highest potential as active and contributing members of society. This paper advocates for implementing recovery-oriented models in drug treatment services. Governments need to continue to promote and support adopting a recovery-oriented approach at a national level based on this language from the recommendations in the 2016 UNGASS outcome document:

“Promote and strengthen regional and international cooperation in developing and implementing treatment-related initiatives, enhance technical assistance and capacity-building and ensure non-discriminatory access to a broad range of interventions, including psychosocial, behavioural and medication -assisted treatment, as appropriate and in accordance with national legislation, as well as to rehabilitation, social reintegration and recovery -support programs, including access to such services in prisons and after imprisonment, giving special attention to the specific needs of women, children and youth in this regard[.]”

Social reintegration is an integral part of the recovery process. Recovery offers a unique opportunity to society to see individuals with substance-use disorders not as a burden, but as fellow human beings that are assets to their families and communities deserving of equal opportunities. Social reintegration is the ultimate goal of the recovery paradigm and the living proof of its value in the long run. Too often, the two aspects are handled separately, endangering results. The social reintegration programs should be implemented as long-term efforts embedded into the journey towards recovery. Addiction takes years from an individual’s life; therefore recovery is also a long-term process. The idea of a “quick fix” is not just ineffective in terms of costs and efforts, but counterproductive because it may allow an individual to spiral into relapse.

A person-centred approach must place recovery at the core of drug dependency treatment and recovery should be made the explicit aim of services for individuals with substance use disorders. The strength of the recovery principle is that it can bring about a paradigm shift – a change in attitude both by service providers and by the individual with the substance use disorder. Recovery looks very different for each person; after all, it is about helping *individuals* achieving their full potential.

Drug treatment services should be based on the following principles:

1. Recovery should be made the explicit aim of all services providing treatment and rehabilitation for people with a substance use disorder;
2. A range of appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services must be available at a local level – since different people with different circumstances inevitably need different routes to recovery; and
3. Treatment services must integrate effectively with a wider range of health care and social services to address a whole-person view of individuals with substance use disorders, not just their addiction.

The Drug Policy Futures network urges all Member States to:

- Ensure that a coherent drug action plan is in place securing the continuum of treatment, recovery, and social reintegration understood as a virtuous cycle.
- Build the capacity of advocacy services and help service users choose the treatment that is right for them.
- Include the principles of recovery in workplace training and development programs.
- Develop approaches to care that focus on the individual.
- Consider a service-focused response to changing patterns of drug use and the development of new treatment approaches.
- Offer real job opportunities and affordable housing to individuals in recovery, and not simply welfare assistance.
- Advocate for recovery, and present recovery champions as living example of the success of recovery

There is no complete recovery if successful social reintegration is not accomplished. Member States should establish a long-term plan that considers all facets of treatment, recovery, and social reintegration as part of a continuum of care, and should invest sufficient resources to ensure adequate implementation at the national and regional levels.

Individuals in recovery deserve a real job and a dignified life. Merely surviving on welfare is not a sustainable option and is not equivalent to thriving. Competitive job opportunities and market salary will boost independence, self-esteem and contribute to the long-term success of the social reintegration, diminishing the chances of relapsing. In times of economic crisis and high housing prices, having options for affordable housing for former drug users could greatly help reintegration.

For too long, the debate in the drug policy field has been focused on whether the primary aim of treatment for people who use drugs should be harm reduction or recovery. This dichotomy is false and counterproductive, since harm reduction and low threshold interventions could be instrumental in approaching active drug users and assisting them in finding their way toward recovery, more that as means in and of themselves. In recent years, there has been a growing understanding on the importance of ensuring that drug treatment services are focused on both reducing the harm associated with continuing drug use by individuals, *and* on supporting their full recovery, socio-economic mobilization and social reintegration.

Any drug strategy must move beyond this distinction and incorporate the principle that recovery is the most effective form of intervention and the needs and aspirations of the users must be placed at the epicentre of their care and treatment. In practice, recovery should be a common goal, implemented in a variety of ways reflecting the complexity of the drug addiction itself and responding to the individual needs and timing. Above all, people aspiring to accomplish their milestones in recovery must have the confidence that they can achieve their personal goals.

This statement is supported by an alliance of networks covering more than 300 NGOs from all over the world:

Drug Policy Futures European Cities Against Drugs IOGT International
Smart Approaches to Marijuana World Federation Against Drugs
Active – Sobriety, Friendship and Peace Recovered Users Network
EURAD – A network for prevention, treatment and recovery
Actis – Norwegian Policy Network on Alcohol and Drugs
FORUT – Campaign for Development and Solidarity