



NEWS RELEASE from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

26 JUNE: INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

New EMCDDA report reveals how a better understanding of the science of 'addiction' can improve our response to drug problems

(26.6.2013, LISBON) Addiction is a global issue that costs many millions of lives each year and causes untold suffering. In a new report, released today to mark **International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking**, the **EU drugs agency (EMCDDA)** looks at how far the science of addiction has come and how this knowledge can be used to help tackle the problem ⁽¹⁾.

Designed to encourage debate and promote understanding of the concept, ***Models of addiction*** provides a critical review of existing addiction theories and explores how these can be organised into an overarching structure to inform how we assess, prevent and treat addictive behaviours. This model is not limited to the traditional illicit drugs of abuse, but also covers alcohol and tobacco use and even non-pharmacological addictions, such as gambling or compulsive use of the Internet.

The new **EMCDDA** report shows that there is no single model of addiction but competing perspectives sharing common elements. With this peer-reviewed analysis, the agency supports drug policy by providing a broad definition of the term, covering substance-based and behavioural addiction and reflecting current scientific developments. The definition of addiction adopted in the report is: 'a repeated powerful motivation to engage in a particular behaviour, acquired through enacting the behaviour with a potential risk of significant harm'.

An essential take-home message from the analysis is that, whilst there are advantages to be drawn from our growing understanding of the biological basis of addiction (e.g. 'brain disease' model), it is not helpful to be over reductive. The report argues that understanding the broader social and psychological aspects of addictive behaviour can also be important for successful prevention and treatment responses. It provides a basis for a more comprehensive and structured approach to developing responses and highlights the need to draw on a pool of interventions (education, persuasion, coercion, training).

Commenting on the issue, **EMCDDA Director Wolfgang Götz** says: 'Addiction continues to be one of the key concepts in the scientific and policy debate around drug use and interventions, and lies at the very heart of the responsibilities of this agency. A better understanding of this complex concept not only informs our monitoring of those in need of help with drug problems, but also how we design and implement effective responses'.

Götz adds: 'Addiction is a multifaceted issue that does not stop at substance-based problems but can also include phenomena such as gambling or compulsive use of the Internet. Indeed we are seeing a number of European countries establishing centres of addiction that potentially cover the full range of addictive behaviours. In future, we need to undertake a broader analysis of addictive behaviours, than is usually undertaken, to allow for the development of more effective intervention strategies. This report raises key questions, such as whether we should continue to monitor addictive use by substance, as at present, or at a more general level'.

⁽¹⁾ ***Models of addiction***, EMCDDA Insights — www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/insights/models-addiction

International day against drug abuse and illicit trafficking: The EMCDDA marks this International day with an event at its premises for the Lisbon diplomatic community and its partners from the Portuguese authorities. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime will be launching its *2013 World drug report* and promoting the theme 'Make health your 'new high' in life, not drugs' (www.unodc.org/drugs).

Publications: Also published today: *Drugnet Europe 82*; *General Report of Activities 2012*; *A year in review 2012*

www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications For more on drugs in Europe, see *European drug report 2013* www.emcdda.europa.eu/edr2013