

1st November 2020

International Drug Users' Day



Today is International Drug Users' Day, where the global community of people who use drugs comes together to celebrate our history and affirm our rights. Twelve years ago today INPUD was formally launched on International Drug Users' Day by drug user rights activists seeking to create an international platform where members of our community could confidently and proudly advocate for the health and human rights of people who use drugs globally. Every year since, we have marked this day with a celebration of our diverse, vibrant communities' accomplishments, while also acknowledging our work is more critical than ever.

This year's International Drug Users' Day comes amidst a time of global uncertainty and upheaval. The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the injustices caused by drug criminalisation, laying bare the fragility of our health systems, economies, and political institutions. Since the implementation of lockdown measures in March 2020 people who use drugs have faced major disruptions to the essential harm reduction services we rely on. This is especially troubling in countries and regions where such services were already sparse or non-existent, once again putting the responsibility of protecting people who use drugs solely on the shoulders of the community. Movement restrictions have disrupted the global supply chain of essential supplies and made it harder than ever for people who use drugs to travel to their harm reduction services. Additionally, the supply of drugs has been limited or cut off entirely in some areas forcing people into involuntary withdrawal. While some communities have been able to adapt to the delivery of services, others have struggled to do so in the absence of state support or funding for peer-led networks. Throughout all this the resurgent Black Lives Matter movement has brought renewed focus to the global function of drug criminalisation as a mechanism of state-sanctioned violence against Black, Indigenous, immigrant and other minority communities.

Yet it is in these moments where the resiliency of our community shines. Across the world people who use drugs have organised to fill the gaps left by insufficient government responses and state apathy towards our health and wellbeing. During the pandemic drug user advocates have: expanded access to take home OST, delivered naloxone and materials where in-person services are shut down, advocated for the release of people held in prisons, provided crucial advice on coronavirus prevention, organised workshops and virtual events, participated in global working groups, rallied against police brutality and advocated for expanding funding for peer-led responses during this global emergency. Many of the policies advocated by our community which were previously considered extreme are more viable than ever, marking this moment as an opportunity to take back autonomy over the decisions which impact our lives.

And so on this International Drug Users' Day, we celebrate the immense strength of our community to uplift our peers and those around us left behind by systemic injustices. We refuse to let this state of affairs prevent us from affirming our place in society and from actively defending our health and human rights. We call for the inclusion of people who use drugs in all aspects of the pandemic response and in all forums of drug and health policy decision-making. We demand an end to racist drug criminalisation policies which strip us of humanity and dignity. We call for the acknowledgement of our most central message: the reclamation of the health, rights and autonomy of people who use drugs everywhere.