

Statement of ADHS Deutschland e.V. in Support of the Inclusion of Methylphenidate in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines

ADHS Deutschland e.V. is a national non-profit organisation providing support, advocacy and education for individuals and families affected by attention-deficit and/or hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It operates more than 200 local and regional support groups, virtual self-support-groups and a federal telephone and mail helpline network of advisers. We are well connected with international self-help organizations providing a profound insight into the needs and daily life of children, adolescents and adults with ADHD worldwide. We strongly support the inclusion of methylphenidate in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (EML).

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a highly prevalent condition affecting 5-7% of children and adolescents worldwide. Characterized by persistent symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity, ADHD significantly impairs academic performance, social functioning, and emotional development. When untreated, ADHD is associated with long-term adverse outcomes, including higher risks of school failure, substance use disorders, accidents, criminal behavior, and mental health comorbidities such as depression and anxiety. Methylphenidate is widely recognized as a first-line pharmacological treatment for ADHD. Its efficacy and safety profile are supported by decades of clinical research and real-world use. Despite its proven effectiveness, global access to methylphenidate remains highly unequal, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where diagnosis and treatment options are severely limited.

The WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) emphasizes scaling up services for mental, neurological, and substance use disorders, especially in LMICs. ADHD falls squarely within this priority, yet is often neglected due to stigma, diagnostic limitations, and lack of treatment availability. Including methylphenidate in the EML sends a strong signal that ADHD is a legitimate and treatable condition, aligning WHO policy with current scientific understanding. This inclusion would encourage national health systems to recognize ADHD treatment as a public health priority, invest in training healthcare providers, and ensure affordable access to a critical medication.

Hence, inclusion of methylphenidate in the EML is a necessary and overdue step to address this disparity and align global health policy with evidence-based treatment standards.

Efficacy and Safety

Various systematic reviews and meta-analyses demonstrate that methylphenidate significantly reduces the core ADHD symptoms compared to placebo whereas other psychosocial interventions failed to provide relevant reductions of core symptoms. Improvements are consistently observed across multiple settings (home, school) and informant reports (parents, teachers). Furthermore, long-term studies have shown that when prescribed appropriately and monitored, methylphenidate is generally well-tolerated. Adverse effects such as reduced appetite or impaired sleep are mostly mild, reversible, and manageable within standard clinical care. Importantly, serious adverse effects are rare, and there is no evidence of increased risk of substance use disorders when methylphenidate is used as prescribed. On the contrary, evidence from large registries clearly shows significant reductions of concomitant psychosocial adversity when treatment is provided continuously.

Previously, lack of randomized controlled long-term studies has been put forward to doubt the relevance of methylphenidate in worldwide health policies. We would like to point out, that randomized-controlled studies denying an highly effective treatment to affected children over long time-periods is neither ethically viable nor practically feasible. The existing data from large registries from northern European countries and Hong Kong provide strong and replicated evidence that long-term treatment is highly beneficial with respect to various health-related risks and conditions.

Public Health and Socioeconomic Impact

Untreated ADHD imposes substantial personal and societal costs. Affected children face challenges in educational attainment, interpersonal relationships, and emotional regulation. These difficulties often persist into adulthood, contributing to reduced productivity, unemployment, increased healthcare utilization, and social exclusion. Evidence indicates that timely treatment with methylphenidate mitigates these risks, improving academic outcomes, reducing disruptive behavior, and enhancing quality of life. For families, effective ADHD treatment reduces caregiver burden and family stress, facilitating healthier developmental environments. Given the global prevalence of ADHD, the inclusion of methylphenidate as an essential medicine would contribute to closing critical treatment gaps, particularly in LMICs where access is currently limited or non-existent. This step would support healthcare systems in providing cost-effective, evidence-based care that prevents the long-term negative outcomes associated with untreated ADHD.

Cost-Effectiveness and Feasibility

Methylphenidate is off-patent and widely manufactured in both immediate-release and extended-release formulations. Generic versions are available, making the medicine affordable and feasible for inclusion in essential drug lists globally. Studies have consistently shown that the costs of treatment are offset by savings in education, healthcare, and social services, further supporting methylphenidate's cost-effectiveness. By providing a safe, affordable, and effective option, methylphenidate empowers

healthcare systems to offer early intervention, improving outcomes for children and adolescents at a relatively low cost.

Summary

ADHD is a global health challenge that, if left untreated, leads to significant and lifelong consequences for individuals and societies. Methylphenidate is a well-established, effective, and safe treatment that reduces ADHD symptoms and prevents many of the disorder's long-term negative effects. Various data sources provide evidence for long-term safety and efficacy.

Inclusion of methylphenidate in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines for children and adolescents with ADHD is a critical step toward equitable healthcare. It will promote global recognition of ADHD as a public health issue, support mental health infrastructure development in resource-limited settings, and ensure that millions of children and adolescents receive the treatment they need to attain adequate and fair chances.

We strongly urge the WHO Expert Committee to advance the rights of children and adolescents worldwide to access essential mental health care.

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