

Agenda Item 10: Health emergency preparedness, response and resilience in the WHO European Region 2024–2029: a new regional strategy and action plan (Preparedness 2.0)

International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care

Access to Controlled Medicines in Health Emergencies

The International Association for Hospice and Palliative Care is inspired by WHO's efforts to respond effectively to health emergencies in fragile, conflict-affected, and vulnerable settings. We commend the inclusion of palliative care as an explicit and essential component of Universal Health Coverage in the Status Report and Action Plan. Nevertheless, we remain deeply concerned for all individuals experiencing serious health-related suffering during these crises.

Internationally controlled essential medicines, listed on the WHO Model List and schedules of international drug control conventions, are alarmingly unavailable in many health systems, even during non-emergency times. According to the WHO, access to morphine is concerning inadequate in many health systems for routine use¹.

The consequences are alarming and inhumane. People suffer unnecessarily.

Severe and acute pain from fractures, wounds, burns and surgical procedures is unrelieved.

Severe pain from advanced cancer is unrelieved.

Extreme distress, agitation and breathlessness are unrelieved.

Mental health deteriorates.

IAHPC urges member states to prioritize the availability of adequate supplies of internationally controlled essential medicines for anesthesia, emergency surgery, trauma care, pain control, substance use disorder and end-of-life care. We call for national competent authorities and policymakers to collaborate with prescribers from all the relevant medical disciplines to provide adequate supplies of opioids and other internationally-controlled medicines for routine care *and* emergency stockpiles.

Rational planning, appropriate training and safe supply chains mitigate diversion and illicit use while ensuring availability for medical purposes, including in health emergencies. IAHPC offers our support to train the workforce in the safe use of controlled medicines including oral and parenteral morphine formulations for people of all ages^{2,3}.

¹ WHO (2023) [Left behind in pain: Extent and causes of global variations in access to morphine for medical use and actions to improve safe access](#)

² IAHPC [Pain Assessment and Management Course](#) (online)

³ IAHPC [Comprehensive Symptom Assessment and Management Course](#) (online)

We recommend convening health cluster consultations to translate high-level joint statements from INCB, UNODC, and WHO on the availability of controlled medicines in emergencies into implementable strategies, to ensure people in health emergencies receive the pain and symptom relief they need⁴.

We respectfully remind Member States to review:

- Joint Statements on the availability of controlled medicines in emergencies issued by the WHO, UN Office of Drugs and Crime, and International Narcotics Control Board³.
- INCB factsheet - Lessons from Countries and Humanitarian Aid Organizations in Facilitating the Timely Supply of Controlled Substances during Emergency Situations Model Guide on Access⁵.
- WHO Report - Left behind in pain: Extent and causes of global variations in access to morphine for medical use and actions to improve safe access¹.

We refer the WHO, Member States and aid agencies providing humanitarian assistance in health emergencies to the global palliative care community's call for access to essential palliative medicine in armed conflict⁶. We call for:

- Adequate supplies of oral and injectable morphine and other pain-relieving medicines for adults and children, as listed in the WHO Model Lists of Essential Medicines, in humanitarian aid response packages.
- Guidelines for all aid and health care workers on the safe use and distribution of opioids and other internationally-controlled medicines.
- Work with receiving authorities to ensure that controlled medicines are not removed from the emergency kits.
- Include controlled medicines in emergency packages for non-communicable diseases for everyone needing them.

⁴ INCB, UNODC and WHO [Joint Statement on Access to Controlled Medicines in Emergencies](#)

⁵ INCB (2021) [Lessons from Countries and Humanitarian Aid Organizations in Facilitating the Timely Supply of Controlled Substances during Emergency Situations Model Guide on Access](#)

⁶ Rosa, William E et al. (2023) [Access to palliative medicine in armed conflict: a basic right and an urgent need](#)

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