

# THE MADRID RECOMMENDATION: HEALTH PROTECTION IN PRISONS AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## INTRODUCTION

The work that prison services develop within the community is frequently poorly acknowledged. Despite this, professionalism amongst its staff is exemplary. As any other public services it is submitted to quality standards continuously demanded by different social sectors. In the particular case of healthcare services, Spanish and European administrations are compelled to ensure that the users of such services are granted a healthcare quality equivalent to that provided outside prison, according to provisions established by the UN and the Council of Europe in the 60s.

These Conferences obviously contribute to preserve that quality level, enabling the broadcasting of good practices in prisons, of protocols to solve problems within the penitentiary setting which are common to a lot of countries and to raise the society's awareness on this part of public medicine which has few opportunities of standing in the spotlight.

Throughout these years, the health care network has focused on encouraging early detection and appropriate treatment of those diseases which are regularly found within prisons, therefore enabling the adoption of harm reduction measures and any other measure related to health promotion which could remarkably contribute to improve health among those communities which inmates come from and to which they return once they serve their sentence.

On account of such work, inmates can take advantage of an opportunity to change unhealthy lifestyles during their imprisonment. They will also be able to implement such new lifestyles with an appropriate planning once they are released.

The Declaration of Madrid is a step more towards universal acknowledgement of prison health services as a powerful tool in the European fight against social inequalities related to health care. As far as countries are committed to respect this declaration, I am sure they will support socially disadvantaged environments within their society to improve health levels and therefore improve such levels in the society as a whole.

At a meeting held in Madrid, Spain during 29-30 October 2009 with representatives from 65 countries worldwide, a high number of national and international agencies and experts in prison health and public health issues, including WHO Regional Office for Europe, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Spanish Ministry of Health and Social Policy, Spanish Ministry of Interior, Spanish Society of Health on Prisons, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Council of Europe's Pompidou Group, Aids Foundation East-West, KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation, Sainsbury Centre for Mental Health and Penal Reform International, with support from the International Journal of Prisoner Health and the Spanish Journal of Prison Health,

**the following Recommendation** was unanimously agreed and accepted as so important that wide dissemination was called for, to all those who could improve the current position worldwide regarding communicable diseases in prison, which are today a persistent threat to community and public health.

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*taking note of the* current facts and figures regarding communicable diseases in prisons worldwide and the high rate of post-release mortality, as presented to the meeting by acknowledged international experts,

*based* on the evidence and the experience of recognized experts in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, TB, sexually transmitted diseases and other infectious diseases as well as accompanying substance abuse and mental health problems,

*justified* by the overwhelming evidence that health protection measures, including harm reduction measures, are effective in prisons,

*encouraged* by the proven beneficial results obtained from initiatives by the Spanish government and other countries in the world,

*aware* of the potential for prisons to contribute to global public health protection and so, to a reduction of health inequalities,

*understanding* that effective prevention depends on early recognition of those at risk at all stages of the criminal justice system

*accepting* that health protection in prisons must not be isolated from comprehensive public health services available in the community

*recognizing the urgent need* in prisons for the following measures, programmes and guidelines aimed to prevent and control major communicable diseases in prison:

- treatment programmes for infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, sexually transmitted diseases and TB
- treatment programmes for drug users, as recommended by WHO, UNODC and other recognized international authorities, and according to assessed needs, resources and national standards
- harm reduction measures
- guidelines on hygiene requirements
- guaranteed through care for prisoners upon entry and after release from prison, in close

collaboration with stakeholders and local health services

- mental health support to prisoners suffering from communicable diseases
- training of all prison staff on prevention, treatment and control of communicable diseases

*calls for the support* and encouragement of the countries and organizations represented at the meeting, through acceptance of this Recommendation, so that

- all countries and relevant organizations support a plan of action to review the present provision of services, to develop a comprehensive health protection programme within all prisons, applying available knowledge according to local needs and resources and to improve monitoring and evaluation;
- the involved parties can together prepare the necessary support material, including an assessment, monitoring and evaluation framework and a collection of expert recommendations, which can be adjusted to offer maximum help to individual countries.