



To: Mr. Jan Woldman, Public Health Service of Amsterdam, (GGD, Amsterdam)

Ms. Jose Manshande, Public Health Service of Amsterdam (GGD, Amsterdam)

We, as drug user networks and harm reduction organisations, are deeply concerned by the decision of International AIDS Society (IAS) and the Public Health Service of Amsterdam (GGD, Amsterdam) to exclude naloxone as a component of harm reduction services at AIDS 2018. Being the world's premier gathering on HIV as a global health issue, it is imperative that critical, life-saving medications be made available. Due to this year's focus on harm reduction and people who use drugs, we expect nothing short of appropriate and comprehensive services, that meet the needs and requirements of conference delegates, be provided by conference organisers.

Naloxone is the antidote to opioid overdose. Ensuring its widespread availability is essential, particularly in a period of an opioid overdose epidemic. Overdose is the principal cause of death of North Americans younger than fifty years old. Similarly, the numbers of drug overdose deaths are rising alarmingly in Europe. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction reported [235 overdose deaths](#) in the Netherlands in 2016. IAS conference delegates unfamiliar with the drugs available in the Netherlands (their potency, purity, quality and/or effects) have considerably increased vulnerability to overdose. We must be blunt: a failure to provide naloxone could well be a failure to save the lives of conference delegates.

The Netherlands has long been recognised for its pragmatic approach to drug use. The selection of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, as the AIDS 2018 host city therefore underscores the failure of IAC and GGD to provide comprehensive harm reduction services for people who use drugs. As a strong and early proponent of harm reduction, The Netherlands has sustained low HIV rates among people who inject drugs. Today, *overdose* is the highest mortality risk for people who use drugs. Despite legal restrictions around the supply of naloxone, it is incumbent on the IAS and GGD to ensure the safety of *all* conference delegates. This includes navigating legal restrictions to ensure naloxone is readily available and accessible at AIDS 2018. Without naloxone, delegates who use drugs are considerably more likely to die.

We call for the IAC and GGD to ensure the adequate distribution of naloxone in formats that can be administered safely, easily and effectively. Failing to do so puts people's lives at risk. AIDS 2018, with its theme of "*Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges*", draws attention to rights-based approaches to more effectively reach key populations. We urge you, as stewards of AIDS 2018, to commit to putting people's lives first and foremost, and ensure the safety and wellbeing of all conference delegates.

Yours sincerely,

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Dr. Rick Lines, Harm Reduction International (*Global*)

Jamie Bridge, International Drug Policy Consortium (*Global*)

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