

NGOs and Options from the Grass Roots

The analysis above summarized some of the chief social and health issues surrounding illicit narcotic consumption, ones which were identified by NGOs and by experts who work at the grass roots level. The following discussion offers a menu of feasible¹⁶ options for consideration by both the federal and provincial governments. What is striking is that the numerous suggestions offered by interviewees, and through the published works of a wide variety of experts, remain highly similar. They tend to focus upon the concept of 'harm reduction'. This perspective clearly falls within the wider rubric of 'human security' - which entails both domestic and global dimensions .

As defined by the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), an NGO which represents the interests of IDUs in the Vancouver's East Hastings Street district, harm reduction means "practical strategies aimed at meeting drug users 'where they are' to reduce harms associated with drug use."¹⁷ This includes harms inflicted upon both the user and upon society in general, as a result of injection drug use. Rather than lofty notions of security, harm reduction is consistent with the domestic dimension of human security, since it 'zooms in' on concrete security issues that clearly affect the lives of individuals and the communities in which they live. The options presented in this section, as noted earlier, shall focus on health and social issues, while more traditional dimensions of human security will be addressed in the following sections - issues such as policing, border control, and so on.

The harm reduction concept often entails a two-pronged medical approach to problem. As a Senior Scientist at Toronto's Addiction and Mental Health Services Corporation observes, "A decision to quit would be supported by appropriate encouragement, therapies or alternative medications, as discussed with and agreed upon by the addict-patient. A decision to keep using would be accompanied by a plan, with the patient's consent, for a more controlled and less harmful pattern of drug use..."¹⁸ Hence, although the harm reduction approach entails programs aimed at ending drug abuse, it postulates that there will always be a population which engages in the injection use of drugs