

NIDA NOTES

Drug Abuse and AIDS

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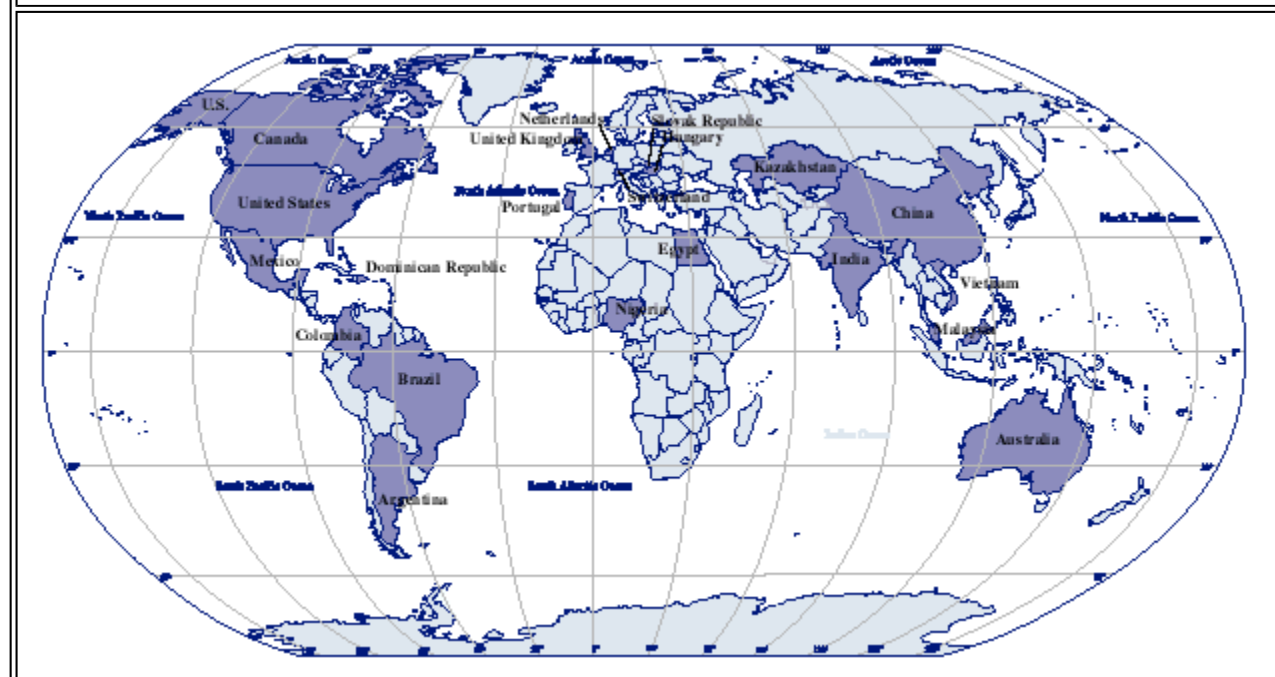
Global Network Will Promote Information Exchange On HIV Prevention in Drug-Using Populations

By **Barbara Cire**, NIDA NOTES Associate Editor

An international research network to facilitate rapid international exchange of information on HIV patterns and trends in drug-using populations was established at a NIDA-sponsored meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, in June. NIDA created the Global Research Network on HIV Prevention in Drug-Using Populations in collaboration with the World Health Organization's Programme on Substance Abuse (WHO/PSA) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

"The Network will enable researchers, policymakers, and public health practitioners around the world to share information about research design and methodologies, as well as effective intervention strategies to prevent the spread of HIV," says Dr. Richard Needle, chief of NIDA's Community Research Branch. Dr. Needle took the lead in planning, organizing, and chairing the meeting. "Numerous HIV prevention and risk reduction programs are being implemented effectively in countries around the world. What is lacking is an expanded, coordinated, structured exchange of information about research and policy related to preventing HIV/AIDS in drug-using populations."

Researchers From 21 Countries Launch Global Network



Countries represented at the first Global Research Network meeting included Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Hungary, India, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Switzerland, United States, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.

The need for an international forum for countries to share information on drug use and HIV/AIDS was identified at a NIDA research synthesis symposium in Arizona in 1997 at which scientists reviewed more than 10 years of research on HIV in drug-using populations. The scientists concluded that the HIV epidemic could be slowed among these populations, but that the exchange of information was crucial to the effort.

At the Geneva meeting, participants discussed the possibility of establishing an interactive electronic system. The system would use Internet links, e-mail, and other methods to rapidly disseminate scientific findings and effective HIV risk-reduction strategies to scientists and public health professionals around the world. As more solid, science-based research is conducted and shared, more effective interventions will be possible, the participants concluded.

More than 60 researchers and public health professionals from 21 countries attended the inaugural meeting of the Global Research Network, which was held in conjunction with the 12th World AIDS Conference. Participants presented overviews of HIV epidemiology and prevention research in their countries. They also reported on the organizational infrastructures and financial mechanisms that support their drug abuse and HIV/AIDS research activities.

Worldwide, 129 countries and territories now report injection drug use, with 108 countries reporting HIV or AIDS in the drug-using population, according to the World Health Organization. In the United States, approximately one-half of the 41,000 new HIV infections each year occur among injecting drug users, their sexual partners, and their offspring. In Argentina, 36 percent of the HIV/AIDS cases are associated with injection drug use, and in Uruguay 26 percent are, according to UNAIDS data. In Asia, injection drug use is the major mode of HIV transmission, representing more than 80 percent of HIV cases in Kazakhstan, 75 percent in Malaysia, 75 percent in Vietnam, and 50 percent in China, said Dr. Andrew Ball, Medical Officer, Treatment and Care, of WHO/PSA. Injection drug use also is the major mode of HIV transmission in North Africa, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East, Dr. Ball said.

"NIDA-funded research in the United States has demonstrated that interventions to reduce the risk of HIV in drug-using populations can be effective," says Dr. Needle. "Through international collaboration in surveillance, prevention, and treatment of drug abuse and its consequences, we can look forward to introducing, adapting, and sustaining effective HIV prevention principles and programs in the global arena."

For More Information

To learn more about the Global Research Network, contact Dr. Richard Needle at (301) 443-6720; fax: (301) 480-4544; e-mail: rn28e@nih.gov.

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