OUT/2019-08-07

Aurelijus Veryga<br>Minister of Health of The Republic of Lithuania

Honorable Minister Veryga,
We, the signed below, express our deep concern about the position of the State Public Health Strengthening Fund under the Ministry of Health on the harm reduction approaches to non-injecting drug use in the Republic of Lithuania, and ask Minister Veryga to state whether this position coincides with the official position of the Ministry of Health.

NGO "Young Wave" participated in the call for proposals ${ }^{1}$ for prevention projects, social information campaigns, scientific research projects, announced by the State Public Health Strengthening Fund. The application was aimed at raising awareness of the risks of the psychoactive substance use and harm reduction among festival and party goers, thereby encouraging the target group to make responsible decisions regarding the use of the psychoactive substances and health. What is more, application aimed to raise awareness about drug use, harm reduction among festivals and parties organizers and staff, as well to break the stereotypes about drug use in the society.

The application received 0 points, thus NGO "Young Wave" sent the request to justify the tender results and received response (Annex No. 1) from the State Public Health Strengthening Fund under the Ministry of Health, regarding the harm reduction services promotion for non-injecting drug users in Lithuania. In the response the State Public Health Fund stated, that "suggested harm reduction tools (reagent test kits, gelatin capsules, straws and other) as well as its distribution and information about the distributed tools during music festivals and in the nightlife settings are not enshrined in Lithuania legal acts, therefore their use and distribution are illegal." It is also stated that "such an activity (distribution of drug paraphernalia and information about it) can impose legal liability for the project <..> implementors/consultants <..> while implementing project activities, because activities can be legally considered as illegal and impose criminal liability. Because from the project point 5.1.2.1. on harm reduction tools (reagent test kits: <...>) it's seen, that project implementors/consultants will have direct contact with people who dispose narcotic and psychotropic substances and most probably the substances are purchased illegally". In the end of the explanation, it is stated that "Project activities oppose to the State and Ministry of Health policy to reduce use of narcotic substances. Project activities are dedicated for safe drug use, and this is not a public health strengthening."

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Gelatin capsules, straws, reagent test kits are legal tools that any person can easily buy at the supermarket or online. If something is not regulated by the national laws, it doesn't mean that it is illegal. Furthermore, we are deeply concerned about the claim that communication and consultation with people who use drugs can impose criminal liability for harm reduction service providers in Lithuania.

According to the EMCDDA, "1 in 10 Lithuanian adults have ever used an illicit substance, with cannabis being the most commonly used drug in Lithuania. Drug use is concentrated among young adults aged 1534 years. In 2016, MDMA/ecstasy was the most common illicit stimulant used by young adults. Among certain sub-groups of young people in Lithuania, the prevalence of psychoactive substance use tends to be higher. One of these sub-groups is those attending recreational settings, such as nightclubs. A 2013 study set in nightclub settings in five main cities found that more than one third of clubbers had used an illicit substance in the past, with cannabis being the most popular drug, followed by cocaine, MDMA and amphetamines. <...> Vilnius is, among the European cities with the highest levels of methamphetamine residues detected in wastewater. "2

Harm reduction tools (such as reagent test kits, gelatin capsules, straws, condoms, etc.) distribution along with information about these tools is a common practice in European Union, as well as in all the world. For example, in the Czech Republic, gelatine capsules are distributed to reduce injecting drug use in the low-threshold facilities. It works as an oral alternative of drug application for those injecting methamphetamines. "Professionals associate three main advantages with the use of capsules: (i) reduction of injecting drug use and related risks, (ii) access to hard-to-reach subgroups of metamphetamine users (for instance, users mainly snorting/sniffing and party-goers) and (iii) better contact with metamphetamine users attempting to quit or to reduce their drug injecting. ${ }^{1 / 3}$

It should also be noted that a number of European countries have been implementing drug checking with the aim of communicating targeted preventive messages to recreational drug users. "This approach, which is more individualised than mass media campaigns, provides an incentive for drug users to participate in a dialogue about prevention and harm reduction, because they get to know the test results, that is they receive information about the particular drugs they are consuming. Pharmacovigilance in the form of drugchecking systems has resulted in timely warning campaigns specifically directed at groups at risk, conveying a level of professionalism that is appreciated by recreational drug users. Such an approach creates more awareness about the specific drugs that are consumed and the options for drug checking. <..> Complemented by other activities implemented in nightlife settings, such as chill-out rooms, the provision of factual and trustworthy information, counselling, good ventilation and other precautionary safety measures, drug checking can serve as an extension of prevention and harm reduction interventions, potentially saving lives." ${ }^{4}$ Furthermore, in Lithuanian "National Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control and Use Prevention Programme 2018-2028" drug checking is included as one of the harm reduction services and that "The application of some measures (of drug checking) in Lithuania is just beginning, and their

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development requires the cooperation of both the state and entertainment organizers and NGOs active in this field." ${ }^{5}$

With respect to the straws as a harm reduction tool, it should also be noted that snorting drugs often requires a device like a straw or a rolled bill. Sharing equipment for snorting can lead to the transmission of hepatitis C. Snorting can lead to nosebleeds, excessive mucous production and the destruction of the septum (the cartilage dividing the two nostrils) which increase the risk of hepatitis $C$ transmission. To prevent the spread of hepatitis $C$, straws are therefore distributed.

We hope that the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania is following the most progressive evidence-based international and European tendencies and approaches in public health and will shortly include the effective harm reduction tools (straws, gelatin capsules) to address non-injecting drug use in the National Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control and use Prevention Program 2018-2028 ${ }^{6}$. Your strong position in support of access to harm reduction services for non-injecting drug users will be crucial to NGOs and service providers working at festivals and in the nightlife settings, will demonstrate that Lithuania is in the row of the leading EU states effectively reducing harm from all forms of drug use, and will ensure progress towards the international targets of Sustainable Development Goals.

With respect,

Anna Dovbakh, Executive Director,
Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA)


Annex No. 1: Response to NGO "Young Wave" from the State Public Health Strengthening Fund under the Ministry of Health of Lithuania Republic

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## LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS SVEIKATOS APSAUGOS MINISTERIJA

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Všt „Jauna banga"
2019-07-29 Nr. (10.2.4.1-142)10-4785
! 2019-07-01 prašymą

## DĖL INFORMACIJOS PATEIKIMO

Sveikatos apsaugos ministerijoje (toliau - Ministerija) gautas Jūsų 2019-07-01 prašymas gauti informaciją apie Jüsų projekto „Statykime tiltus, o ne sienas: lygus lygiam jaunimo konsultantų itraukimas $\mathfrak{i}$ psichikos sveikatos stiprinimą" vertinimo išvadas. Atsižvelgiant $\mathfrak{i}$ tai, kad Projektų, finansuojamц̨ Valstybinio visuomenès sveikatos stiprinimo fondo lèšomis, konkursų organizavimo ir šių projektụ finansavimo sutarčiu sudarymo ir vykdymo tvarkos aprašas (toliau - Aprašas) nustato, kad projektus vertina Fondo taryba (Aprašo 37 punktas), pateikiame Fondo tarybos atsakymą í Jūsų prašymą.

PRIDEDAMA: 6 lapa।.

Sveikatos apsaugos viceministras


Algirdas Šešelgis

# VALSTYBINIO VISUOMENĖS SVEIKATOS STIPRINIMO FONDO TARYBA 

Vš! „Jauna banga"

## DĖL INFORMACIJOS PATEIKIMO

Sveikatos apsaugos ministerijoje (toliau - Ministerija) gautas Jūsų 2019-07-01 prašymas gauti informaciją apie Jūsụ projekto „Statykime tiltus, o ne sienas: lygus lygiam jaunimo konsultantụ jtraukimas i psichikos sveikatos stiprinimą" vertinimo išvadas. Atsižvelgiant i tai, pateikiame Valstybinio visuomenés sveikatos stiprinimo fondo tarybos (toliau - Taryba) nariy atliktą Jūsu projekto 2019 m . birželio 13 d . vertinimo išvadą (pridedama). Tarybos nariụ vertinimu, projektui buvo skirta 0 balų, kiekvienas iš projekto vertinimo formoje nurodytu vertinimo kriteriju buvo ivertintas 0 balu.

Pažymètina, kad Lietuvos Respublikos sveikatos sistemos istatymo 38-1 straipsnio „Valstybinis visuomenès sveikatos stiprinimo fondas" 1 dalyje numatyta, kad Fondo léšos naudojamos visuomenés sveikatos išsaugojimo ir stiprinimo veikloms. Fondo Tarybos sprendimu Jūsu projekte siūlomos veiklos, skirtos saugiam narkotinių medžiagu vartojimui, nèra visuomenès sveikatos stiprinimas.

PRIDEDAMA: Paraiškos vertinimo forma, 5 lapai.

Tarybos pirmininkas


Šarūnas Narbutas

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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ https://sam.Irv.It/It/struktura-ir-kontaktai/darbo-grupes-ir-komisiios-1/valstybinio-visuomenes-sveikatos-stiprinimo-fondo-dokumentai/2019-m-projektu-finansavimo-konkurso-dokumentai/2019-m-kvietimas-teikti-paraiskas-valstybinio-visuomenes-sveikatos-stiprinimo-fondo-lesoms-gauti-prevenciniu-projektu-socialiniu-informaciniu-kampaniju-mokslo-tyrimu-projektu-igyvendinimui

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11308/lithuania-cdr-2018-with-numbers.pdf
    ${ }^{3}$ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/49762244 Use of gelatine capsules for application of methamphe tamine A new harm reduction approach
    4http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/attachments/6339/EuropeanResponsesGuide2017 BackgroundPape r-Drug-checking-harm-reduction 0.pdf

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[^3]:    ${ }^{5}$ https://e-seimas.Irs.It/portal/legalAct/It/TAD/a50bec00035b11e9a017f05dde6559c6
    ${ }^{6}$ http://ntakd.Irv.It/uploads/ntakd/documents/files/National\%20Drug\%20Programme\%20Summary.pdf

