26 June 2012 | Geneva – Most people with **drug use disorders** do not receive effective treatment and care, according to a new WHO information system that, for the first time, provides details on the resources allocated to the
prevention
and
treatment
of
alcohol
and
drug-related problems
in 147 countries. Until now, drug dependence has not been recognized as a health problem in many countries and
stigma
and
discrimination
associated with drug dependence have been major barriers to appropriate treatment.

“Drug dependence is a disorder that can be treated effectively but, unfortunately, the large majority of persons who need it do not have access to treatment,” says Dr Shekhar Saxena, Director of the Department for Mental Health and Substance Abuse. “The data presented in the new system illustrate the huge gaps that still exist in the area of drug dependence treatment. But more and more countries realize the benefits of treatment for drug and alcohol dependence, not only for the individuals themselves, but also for the society and the economy.”

According to new UN estimates, worldwide about 230 million adults (aged 15-64), or 5% of the adult population, used an illicit drug at least once in 2010, including about 27 million people with severe drug problems.

The WHO Global Health Observatory Database – *Resources for the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Use Disorders* now provides such data for each country as funding, staff and services and thereby complements the already available information on scope and associated harms of substance use disorders. The country profiles included in the new system cover 88% of the world’s population.

“The availability of drug dependence treatment lags well behind treatment and care offered for

other diseases according to our data," explains Dr Vladimir Poznyak, Coordinator of the Management of Substance Use team at WHO. "For example, only 45% of the assessed countries are able to provide essential medicines to treat the dependence on heroin and other opiates and in almost half of the countries where treatment is available not more than one in 5 persons with drug use disorders benefits from the services. A quarter of the countries which identify opiates as the main drug problem do not offer the range of medications recommended by WHO."

Drug dependence is a disorder that can be treated effectively with low-cost medicines and standardized psychological therapies. In particular, the treatment of heroin dependence has been very successful in reducing HIV infection due to unsafe injection, crime and the risk of death through overdose.

WHO has been working closely with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) since 2009 to increase the access to treatment for people with drug use disorders. The understanding that drug abuse, at its core, is a public health issue has increased in recent years. However, only 82 countries offer special health services to people with drug use disorders.

With the launch of the new global information system WHO commemorates the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking celebrated by the UN every year on 26 June.