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Vilnius, Lithuania

## **World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for Harm reduction has been established at Vilnius University**

By the initiative of World Health Organization (WHO) the Collaborating Centre for Harm Reduction (WHO's CC) has been established at the Vilnius University Public Health Institute (PHI) in the 2013.

"WHO's designation of the PHI as the first Collaborating Centre on Harm Reduction reaffirms the importance of and our commitment to applying evidence-informed interventions when responding to HIV in the European Region", says Martin Donoghoe, Programme Manager, HIV/AIDS, STIs & Viral Hepatitis for the WHO Regional Office for Europe. "This also comes as recognition of the great work of Lithuania's PHI especially in knowledge dissemination and peer training of a specialized health care force in eastern European and central Asian countries to prevent HIV infections caused by injecting drug use, which remains the principal mode of transmission in the eastern part of our Region."

WHO's CC is the first such centre among more than 800 institutions in over 80 countries dedicated to strengthen the capacity building of stakeholders and research on harm reduction, also it has been launched with the support of Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN) and Vilnius Centre for Addictive Disorders.

Harm reduction is a set of policies, programs, services and actions that aim to reduce the harms to individuals, communities and society related to drugs, including HIV infection. Lithuania has been one of the regions' leaders in implementing WHO recommendations on HIV prevention among people injecting drugs. The first harm reduction program in Lithuania was established back in 1997 in the seaport city Klaipėda, the mobile harm reduction point and low-threshold opioid substitution treatment programs are operating at Vilnius Center for Addictive Disorders since 2001. Early introduction of harm reduction programs enabled Lithuania to now have lower numbers of HIV cases compared to its neighbors.

The PHI has been established in 2002 and it is one of two institutes at the Faculty of Medicine in Vilnius University. The institute is providing public health education on the bachelor, master and PhD level and performing scientific research in the fields of the impact of environmental to the public health, health and the quality of life and other health and health management related issues.

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