

Topic 8:

Singapore's Drug Prevention Approach



Singapore's Drug Prevention Approach

Singapore adopts a comprehensive drug control strategy built on three pillars: preventive education, tough laws with robust enforcement, and evidence-informed rehabilitation. It places strong emphasis on an upstream education through a Whole-of-Government (WOG) effort led by the Inter-Ministry Committee on Drug Prevention for Youths (IMC).

Singapore's drug prevention approach is holistic and science-based, aligned with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) International Standards on Drug Use Prevention.¹ It combines early intervention with age-appropriate programmes delivered across schools and communities, engaging individuals, families and community partners.

Reference:

¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, & World Health Organization. (2018). *International standards on drug use prevention* (2nd updated ed.).



Singapore's Drug Prevention Approach

The Core Pillars of Singapore's Drug Control Strategy:

Preventive drug education (PDE):

Educates the community on the harms of drugs, strengthens youths' resilience against drug abuse and builds community support for a drug-free Singapore.

The IMC, established in August 2023, supports this WOG response to protect youths from drug harms.



Tough laws and rigorous enforcement:

Provide a strong deterrence against drug trafficking, reduce the supply of drugs entering Singapore and help keep the drug situation under control.



Evidence-informed rehabilitation:

Supports drug abusers through rehabilitation and reintegration, helping those who want to remain drug-free to do so.



Revisit Topic 1: Understanding Singapore's Drug Policy² for an overview of Singapore's drug policy and local drug situation.

Reference:

²Central Narcotics Bureau. (n.d.). DrugFreeSG Champions – Training materials: *Topic 1, Understanding Singapore's drug policy*. ([link](#))

Harm Prevention or Harm Reduction

Countries adopt different approaches to addressing drug-related issues, depending on their local drug situation, public health risks and policy objectives.

Broadly, **harm prevention** seeks to stop drug abuse before it begins through education, enforcement and community resilience. **Harm reduction**, on the other hand, seeks to minimise the health and social harms experienced by individuals who continue to consume drugs.

Understanding these two approaches helps explain why Singapore prioritises harm prevention as its core strategy.



Harm Prevention or Harm Reduction

Professor Stella Quah of Duke-NUS Medical School analysed the approaches adopted by 11 countries across Europe, Asia and the Commonwealth, comparing harm prevention and harm reduction strategies.³

The Key Distinction



Harm Prevention

Focuses on preventing and eliminating drug abuse through coordinated prevention, enforcement, treatment and rehabilitation efforts.



Harm Reduction

Focuses on reducing the negative health and social consequences of ongoing drug consumption, recognising that some level of drug consumption may continue.

Reference:

³Quah, S. R. (2020). From harm reduction to harm prevention: A cross-national comparison of eleven countries. In Home Team Academy, Home Team Journal: Special issue — Spotlight on drugs (pp. 4–16). Ministry of Home Affairs. ([link](#))

Why Harm Prevention Works for Singapore

Singapore's harm prevention strategy focuses on preventing drug problems before they become widespread. It is well suited to Singapore's low-prevalence environment and differs from harm reduction strategies adopted in countries facing more widespread or entrenched drug challenges.

Three key success factors that help protect our community from drug harms:

1 Robust Enforcement Keeps Drug Availability Low

- Singapore's drug control strategy combines strict laws, robust enforcement, preventive education and rehabilitation.
- CNB disrupts drug syndicates and seizes illicit drugs through sustained enforcement operations.
- CNB works closely with the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority, Singapore Police Force and other Home Team agencies to disrupt supply and prevent drug inflows.



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Why Harm Prevention Works for Singapore

2 An Evidence-Informed and Sustainable Rehabilitation System

- Singapore's prison system remains stable, with a strong focus on rehabilitation and community reintegration.
- Prisons in Singapore operate at about 70% of intended capacity.⁴ By comparison, more than 60% of countries worldwide operate prisons above 100% capacity.⁵



References:

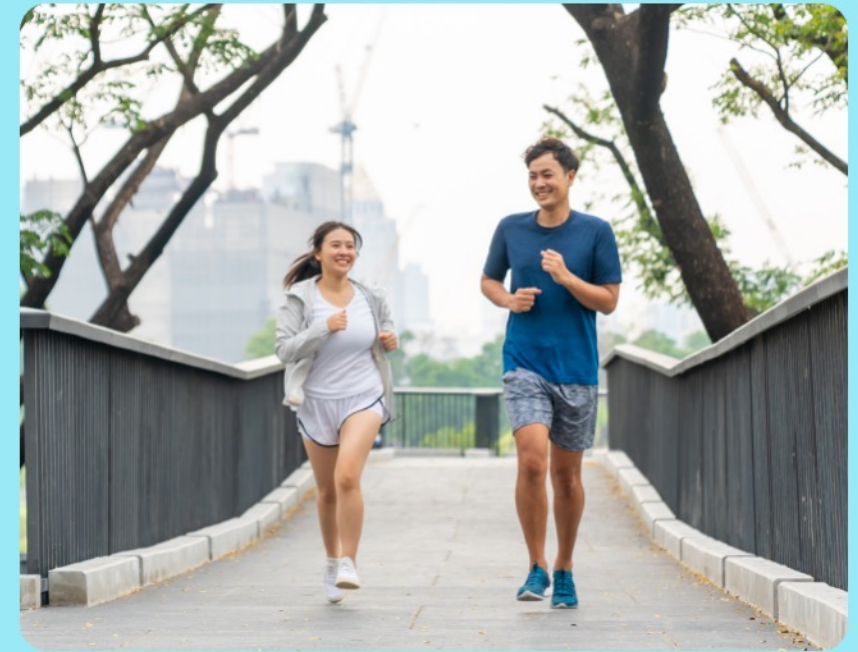
⁴ Channel NewsAsia. *Prison conditions in Singapore are acceptable; no fans, mattresses in cells for security: Shanmugam*

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2025). *Prison matters 2025: Global prison population and trends – A focus on rehabilitative environments.*

Why Harm Prevention Works for Singapore

3 Low Drug-Related Health Risks

- Adult HIV prevalence in Singapore remains low at about 0.1–0.2% among persons aged 15–49.
- According to the Communicable Diseases Agency, in 2024, 96% of newly reported HIV cases were sexually transmitted, with injecting drug use accounting for a small proportion.⁶
- In countries with higher levels of injecting drug use, harm reduction measures — including needle and syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy, supervised consumption options and naloxone distribution — are implemented to reduce HIV and hepatitis C transmission risks and prevent overdose deaths.^{7,8}



References:

⁶ Communicable Diseases Agency. (2025). *Update on the HIV/AIDS situation in Singapore 2024*. Ministry of Health.

⁷ UNAIDS. (2016, October 9). *Harm reduction: A key strategy for HIV prevention*. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.

⁸ World Health Organization. (n.d.). *People who inject drugs*. WHO Global HIV, Hepatitis and STIs Programme.

UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention

The UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention provide evidence-based guidance to strengthen drug prevention efforts worldwide.⁹ Singapore's PDE strategy is aligned with these standards and delivered through coordinated, domain-specific initiatives under the IMC.

How Singapore Applies the Standards

- Agencies deliver targeted prevention initiatives within their respective domains while reinforcing consistent drug-free messages.
- Programmes are tailored to key touchpoints, spanning families, schools, communities and National Service.
- Together, these initiatives strengthen protective factors through early prevention, public education, youth engagement and community mobilisation.



Reference:

⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime & World Health Organization. (2018). *International standards on drug use prevention* (2nd updated ed.).

UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention

	Prenatal/ Parental 	School 	National Service 
Target Group	Expectant mothers and families	Primary to tertiary students	National Servicemen
Key Initiatives	Promote early parental engagement and prevention messaging to strengthen protective factors	Embed PDE across schools and Institutes of Higher Learning through curricula, support networks and national anti-drug campaigns.	Embed PDE throughout the National Service journey by equipping commanders, recruits, pre-enlistees and parents with timely information, tools and support.
Supporting Agencies	Ministry of Health, Health Promotion Board	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Defence

UNODC International Standards on Drug Use Prevention

Family



Target Group

Families supporting youths

Key Initiatives

Embed PDE across family and youth touchpoints while equipping practitioners, parents and volunteers to reinforce drug-free values.

Supporting Agencies

Ministry of Social and Family Development, Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth

Community



Youths, parents and general public

Amplify PDE messages through digital platforms, public spaces, youth and community networks, and sports-based outreach to raise awareness and strengthen drug-free norms.

Ministry of Digital Development and Information, Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth, Ministry of Social and Family Development, People's Association, SportSG

Key Takeaways

1

Singapore's drug control strategy is built on three pillars.

Preventive education, tough laws with robust enforcement and evidence-informed rehabilitation work together as a holistic, science-based and coordinated approach led by multiple government agencies under the IMC.

2

Singapore prioritises harm prevention over harm reduction.

Singapore's low drug prevalence supports a prevention-first approach rather than one focused on reducing the harms of ongoing drug use. This is reinforced by strong enforcement, a stable rehabilitation system and low drug-related health risks, including a very low HIV prevalence rate.

3

Preventive drug education spans the life course.

PDE is delivered across key touchpoints — from the prenatal stage and family settings to schools, the community and National Service — with different agencies leading initiatives at each stage to reinforce drug-free norms.

Further Reading and Resources



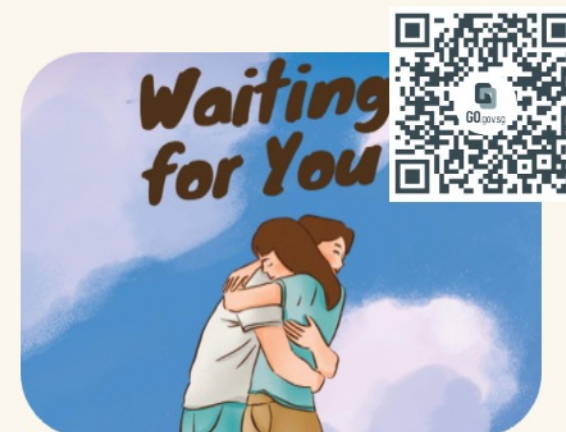
PDE Information Package
<https://go.gov.sg/cnb-pdeinfo>



List of Controlled Drugs and Inhalants
<https://go.gov.sg/cnb-druginfo>



Stories from Victims of Drug Abuse
<https://go.gov.sg/rday>



Compilation of Narratives from Family and Loved Ones of Drug Abusers
<https://go.gov.sg/waitingforyou-book>

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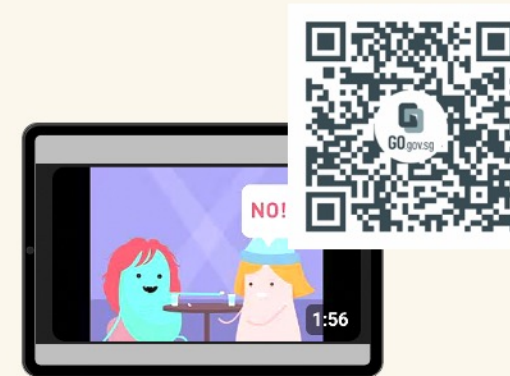
Further Reading and Resources



Be Aware. Be Wise. Think Twice.
<https://go.gov.sg/DrugFreeSG-BeAware>



Down the Rabbit Hole
<https://go.gov.sg/DrugFreeSG-RabbitHole>



Mythbuster Series
<https://go.gov.sg/DrugFreeSG-Mythbuster>

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