

The Netherlands Lost its Frontline Position Caring for Drug Users

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Sadly the international war on drugs has taken its toll on the Netherlands, a country that once stood up for health and harm reduction based policies. A few years ago the Netherlands had a leading position in the western world with respect to the care for drug users and the handling of drug related problems. Today that leading position, including respect and confidence is slipping away. While many countries throughout Europe are moving towards decriminalization of drugs and broadening ways to effectively deal with drug related problems, the Netherlands takes a reverse approach that adversely affects the lives of thousands of drug users. The 'Dutch way' has become more conservative, both in a formal and in an informal way.

The Belangenvereniging Druggebruikers MDHG, Europe's first drug user union, established in 1977 urges all drug user groups throughout Europe to join us, supporting our protest against the government and the drug policies they currently propose.

MDHG's mission since its founding has been to offer representation and advocacy of drug users' interests in government and to offer a venue to improve the well being of drug users, on a personal level and with national policies that directly effect the lives of its members. The MDHG pursues interests from the perspective of its membership through direct advocacy, providing information, identifying trends and developments, conducting research, providing advice and practical help. MDHG endorses the importance of policies that include the rights of drug users, and having drug users involved in the proceedings.

Therefore we kindly ask you to please join us and sign below to support MDHG's opposition to the policies listed:

1. Wietpas: Cannabis Buyers Pass

Dutch laws concerning the selling of cannabis products is much more liberal than in surrounding countries. As a result people from the surrounding countries tend to buy cannabis products in the Netherlands. To diminish what the government identifies as problems related to 'drug tourism', cannabis and cannabis products will only be sold to and purchased by individuals who have a 'Wietpas', an ID-like card that is only available for people with Dutch residence. This new policy will quickly cause the selling of cannabis to return to the streets again and will require consumers to become registered members of a coffeeshop, preventing the ability to purchase in other coffeeshops, and will require coffeeshops to report and restrict the number of registered consumers.

2. Inrichting Stelselmatige Daders (ISD): Institution of Offenders

Since a couple of years, new laws have been passed that make it easier to imprison drug users for a period of up to 2 years. This regulation was first intended to be applied to a small group of hardcore criminal offenders, now anyone who commits less severe ‘petty’ crimes are likely to receive prison sentences.

3. Eigen Bijdrage: Self-pay Contribution

Starting January 1st 2012 individuals who start treatment for drug addiction must pay €220 annually and €145 a month for clinical treatments. This self-pay system causes barriers for many to seek and to enter drug treatment.

4. Examples of Informal changes:

The police have increased profiling tactics and frequency of random searches of drug users in public locations, including confiscating drugs that are found, and to fine drug users for the possession of paraphernalia like pipes and even lighters.

We the undersigned gladly support MDHG’s efforts in preventing these policies above to be put into law and strongly urge Dutch government officials not to consider these repressive damaging policies.

Name	Organization	Email	Date

