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INNOVATIVE RESPONSES TO EMERGING DRUG USE PROBLEMS

Sedronar

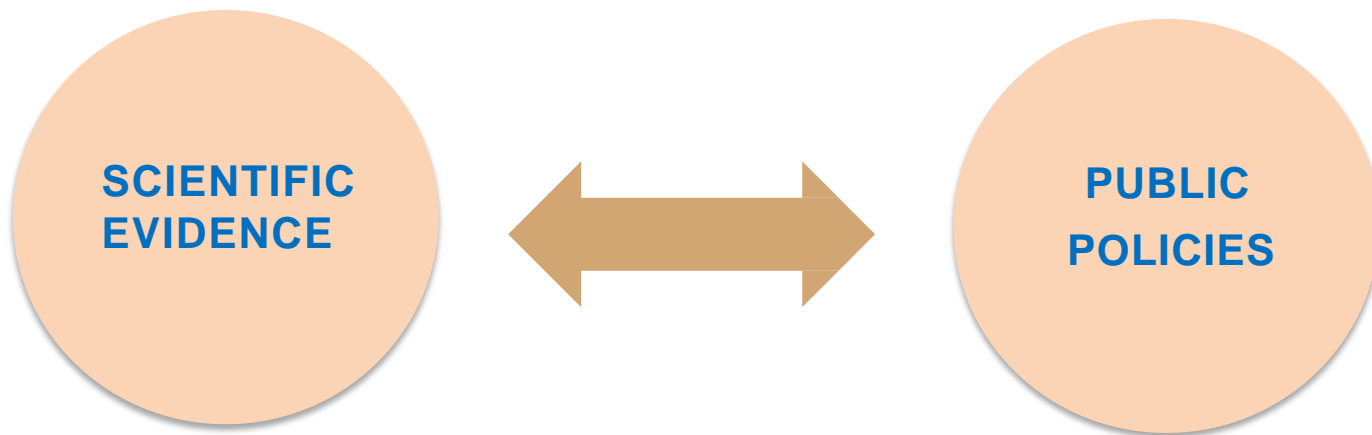
Secretaría de Políticas Integrales
sobre Drogas de la Nación Argentina

SEDRONAR: Secretariat on Comprehensive Policies on Drugs of the Argentine Nation

Innovative responses to emerging drug use problems

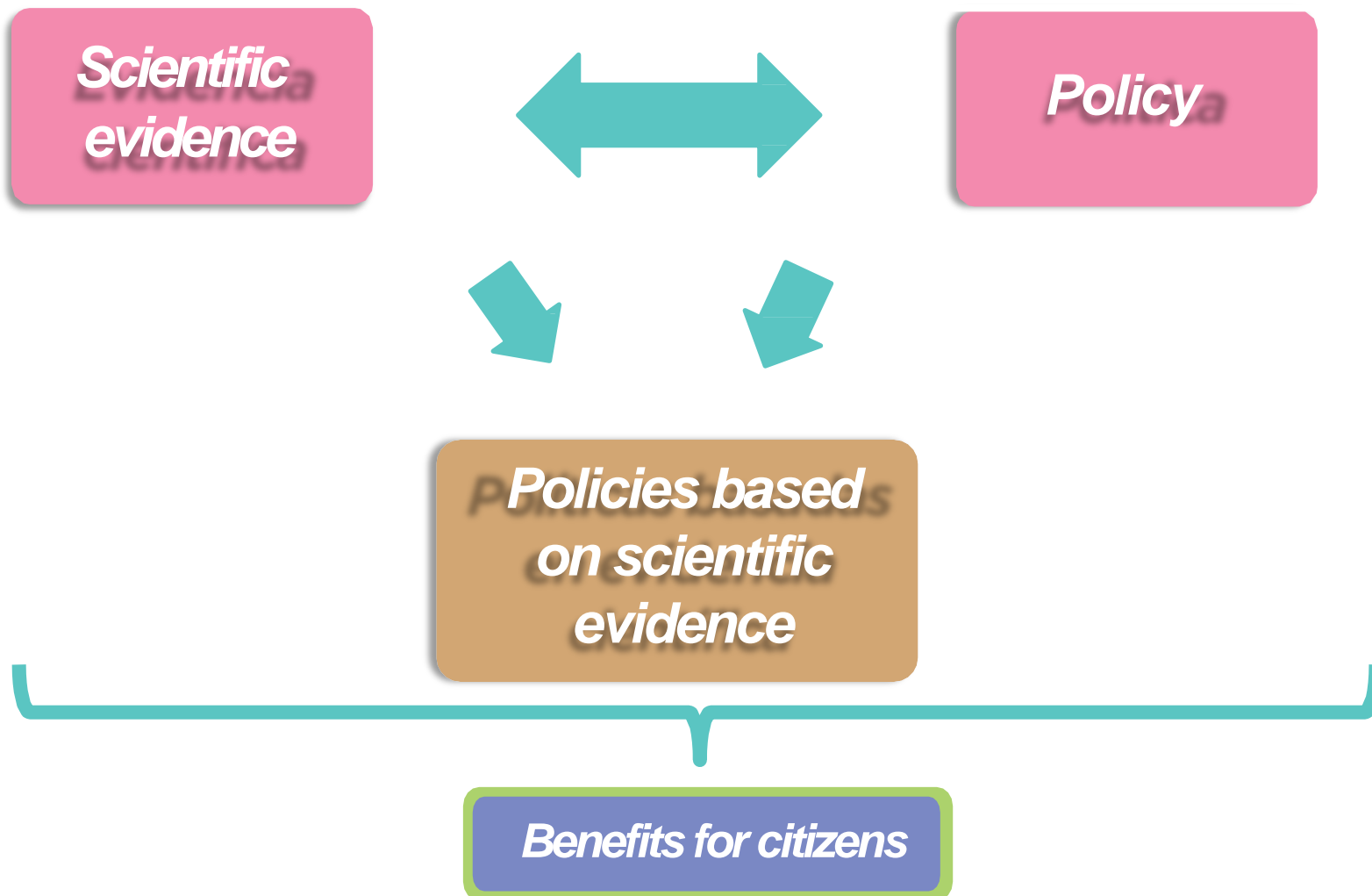
Buenos Aires – May 2019

Evidence-based policies



How do they communicate with each other?

Evidence-based policies



Why is it necessary to investigate and produce scientific evidence on drug demand reduction issues?

- ✓ To identify emerging trends in the use of psychoactive substances.

To obtain objective information on good practices, in order to plan & organize interventions in care and treatment.

- ✓ Provide the authorities with valid data for the design of local, national, and regional strategies on drugs.
- ✓ Contribute to the efforts of the international community to obtain, analyze, and interpret data on drug use at the regional, hemispheric, and world levels.

The countries of the region respond by producing scientific evidence on the use and consequences of psychoactive substances, evidence which is centralized in the National Drug Observatories.

How do the National Drug Observatories in the region produce scientific evidence?

- ❖ Epidemiological studies on substance use (secondary school students, university students, treatment centers, prison population, etc.).
- ❖ Studies to describe substance use among specific populations (street people, etc.).
- ❖ Epidemiological surveillance (telephone helplines, epidemiological surveillance windows).
- ❖ Risk and protective factors for substance use.
- ❖ Evaluation instruments, social and health indicators for prevention and treatment programs.
- ❖ Local information for mapping and spatial analysis of substance use.
- ❖ Centralizing information, analyzing developments and trends in substance use and related problems at the local, national, regional, and international levels.
- ❖ Early warning system to prevent and reduce the impact on individuals and public health of NPS and new forms of substance use.

Drug use: A complex problem

- Associated with cultural, socio-economic, and psychological factors
- Continual emergence of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) + Adulterants
- New patterns of use
- New sources of purchasing (social networks)
- Increase in acute clinical manifestations related to higher prevalence of drug use, with heavy negative impact on health
- Proposals to change the law that are pushing for legalization of drugs
- Increased social tolerance of drug use due to changes in social representations that help reduce the perception of the risk of drug use

How does the region investigate this complexity?

Using complementary quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection that address the complex social, cultural, economic, and legal phenomenon of psychoactive substance use, using a mixed method strategy (Creswell, 2014) that allows for more complex outcomes and constructs richer and more reliable data.

Quantitative survey methods used in the region

- General population studies
- Studies among secondary school students
- Studies among university students
- Census of centers for the treatment and rehabilitation of substance users
- Studies on the profiles of patients in treatment
- Studies on drug use and emergency room admissions

Strength: They provide a valid diagnosis of the extent and impact of substance use in the general population and in particular populations, based on probabilistic sample

Weaknesses: Large probabilistic samples using a survey methodology are very costly. They do not allow for investigating substance use among “hidden populations”, nor do they investigate in depth the lifestyles and cultural connotations, that is to say, they cannot collect comprehensive information on aspects that lead to onset of drug use or the development of problem use.

Which alternative methods does the Uruguayan Observatory on Drugs use?

- Laboratory studies on sewage at rave parties: Urine screening for NPS and other substances
- RDS (quantitative) + ethnographic method (qualitative) in vulnerable populations, allowing for access to hidden populations. Sampling using mathematical models.
- Trendspotting: mixed methods for exploration of emerging phenomena, interpretive synthesis of different but complementary aspects.
- Indirect methods to estimate the number of users of Cocaine Base Paste by superposing samples of problem users of cocaine base paste who participated in the RDS study with a sample of patients seeking treatment



Alternative methods used by the National Drug Observatory of Chile

- Studies on Risk and Protective Factors for psychoactive substance use among population aged 14-24 (qualitative studies, using focus group techniques with secondary school and university students, in order to understand the reasons why people choose to use or not use alcohol and drugs)

“Reasons for alcohol use among youth population”

“Reasons for non-use of marijuana among youth population”



Alternative methods used by the Drug Observatory of Colombia

Monitoring of coca leaf crops, based on the interpretation of satellite images and on the validation of data obtained through aerial reconnaissance.

Calculation of the total area of coca crops is the result of the selection and acquisition of satellite images; pre-processing of images; incorporation into the georeferencing system; visual interpretation of coca plots and tracking (analysis over time)



Alternative methods used by the Drug Observatory of Argentina

Social imagery and discourse about the Reasons for use/non-use of marijuana among school children who are non-users. Qualitative study using a Focus Group method, replicating the Chilean study that provides information for designing prevention activities.

- Psychoactive substance use and therapeutic history of young people in Juvenile Detention Centers. This is a quantitative-qualitative study (population aged 13-20, survey + interviews). Provides information for assessing the level of substance use, and the defects in the prevention and treatment areas that lead to such use.



Alternative methods used by the Drug Observatory of Argentina

- **Epidemiological surveillance:** quantitative, local, non-probabilistic samples (small towns, neighborhoods, schools, health centers) with diagnostic of substance use, for developing local drug plans and/or designing prevention interventions.
 - Draws on local experiences and knowledge
 - Simplicity of method
 - Little time for administration in the field
 - Few economic and human resources
 - Participation and awareness of key stakeholders.
 - Collective production of systematized data as input for collective reflection among community stakeholders



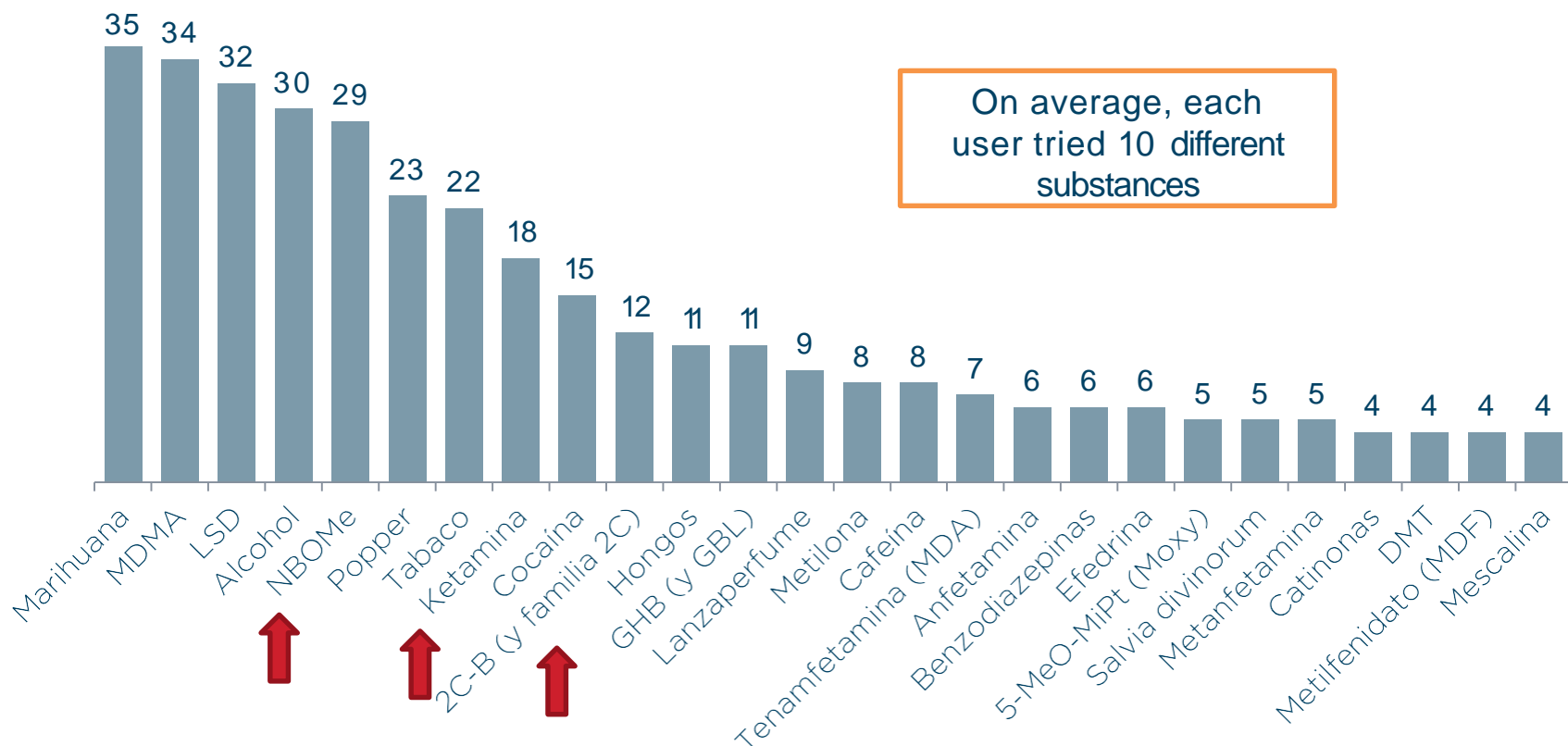
Alternative methods used by the Observatory on Drugs of Argentina

- **Information on drugs in virtual communities/forums**
 - Exploring the different topics raised in Argentine forums of users of designer drugs:
 - Efficient approach to gathering data on specific populations that remain invisible to traditional studies.
 - Information already published and easily accessed.
 - User anonymity.
 - Virtual communities that produce feelings of belonging and cooperation.
 - Generate early warnings about current use and the emergence of NPS, new patterns of use, and re-emerging substances.



Extent of use of different substances

LIFETIME USE OF SUBSTANCES, with more than 3 mentions. July 2016 to February 2017. N=35

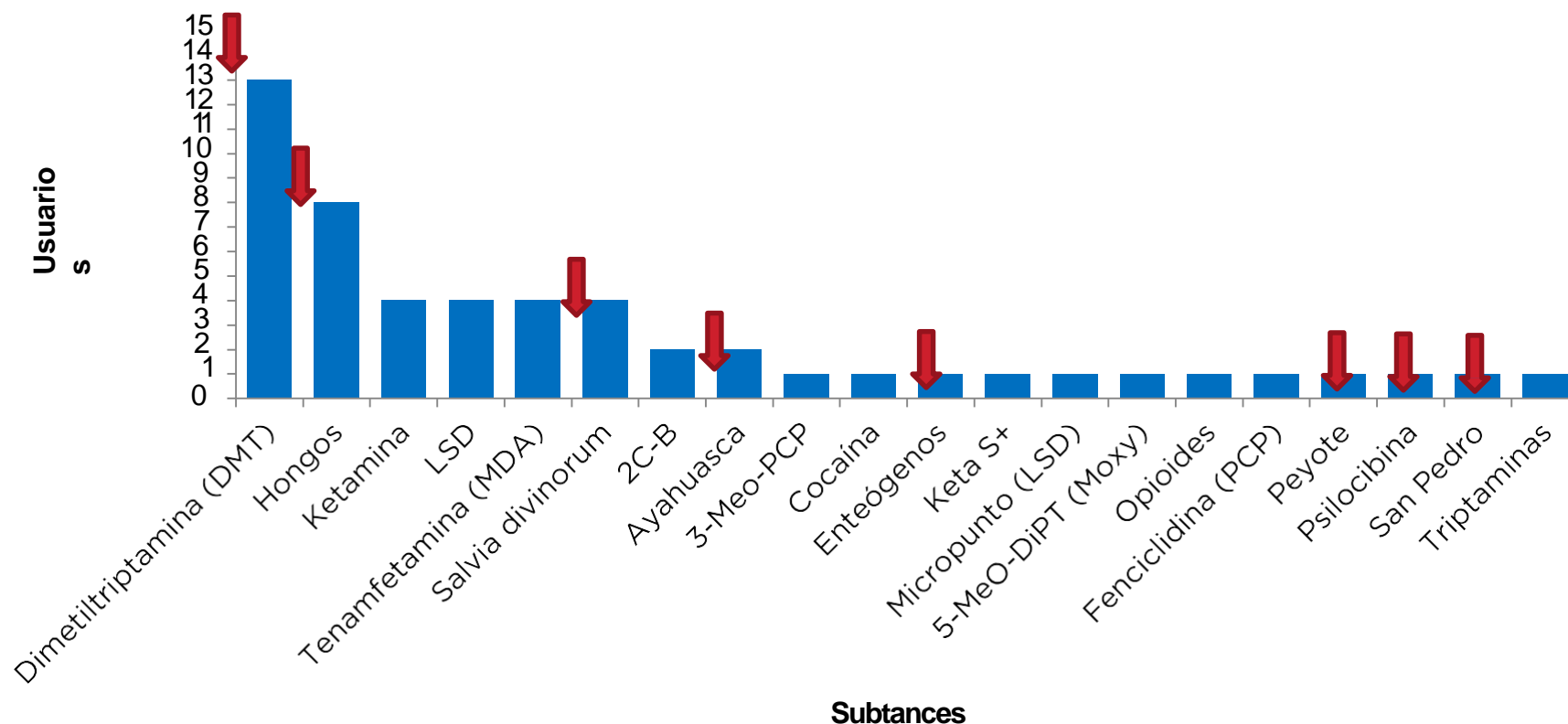


SOURCE: Taken from the Argentine forum of users of designer drugs. December 2018.

Substances that awaken greatest interest



SUBSTANCES THAT AWAKEN GREATEST INTEREST IN USERS' FORUM
July 2016 to February 2017. N=35.



SOURCE: Taken from the Argentine forum of users of designer drugs. December 2018.

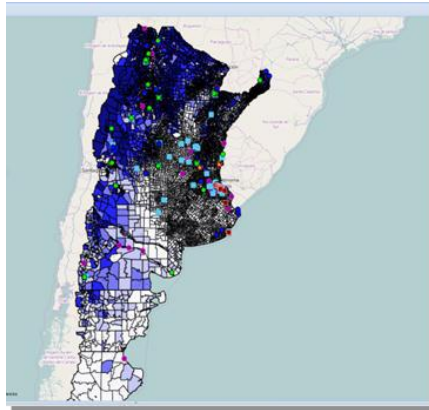
Alternative methods used by the Observatory on Drugs of Argentina

- **Instrument for certification of treatment centers, quality standards.**
- Adaptation to validated quality standards of institutional practices in the areas of treatment, prevention, and training
- Indicators of structural and functional adaption and evaluation of outcomes
- Recasting of the tools for the Audit Registry
- User satisfaction surveys
- Development of an Audit Procedures Manual.
- Methodological appendix to the method for applying the instruments and methodology for weighting.
- Permanent registries (supply control, treatment, vital statistics).



Alternative methods used by the Observatory on Drugs of Argentina

- Identification and analysis of critical areas of the country in terms of substance use, by means of a GIS (Geographical Information System)
 - Production of indices on size of territories, substance use, and socio-demographic data
 - Mapping to facilitate visualization, interaction, and analysis of information on a particular territory
 - Socio-spatial analysis in order to place treatment facilities in areas of greater social vulnerability



Alternative methods used by the Observatory on Drugs of Argentina

- Diagnostic of problems associated with psychoactive substance use using participatory mapping
- Spatial analysis of problems associated with substance use in defined areas or territories (neighborhoods, places) from a multidimensional, community perspective
- Full participation of community leaders
- Surveys
- Group analysis of the local map



Many thanks!

Questions?

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