

Heroin Assisted Treatment

Heroin-Assisted Treatment (HAT) is a life-saving intervention for individuals struggling with addiction to illegal heroin when other treatments have not succeeded. Empirical studies demonstrate that HAT programs, as part of comprehensive treatment strategy, provide substantial benefits to long-term heroin users who have not been responsive to other treatment.

- 1912** Public health officer Charles Terry opens first U.S. narcotics clinic in Jacksonville, Florida.
- 1914** Harrison Narcotics Act passes, requiring physicians to register and pay a tax when prescribing heroin.
- 1919** Opiate maintenance clinic opens in Shreveport, LA, administering to over 1,200 patients over its 4-year operation.
In *Webb v. United States*, the Supreme Court interprets the Harrison Narcotics Act so that “addiction maintenance” is deemed unlawful.
- 1924** The Heroin Act criminalizes manufacture and possession of heroin, including for medical use.
- 1953** Medical Society of Richmond County (NY) proposes opening maintenance clinics under supervision of US Public Health Service (one year after the Community Chest and Council– the forerunner to the United Way– recommends heroin maintenance as part of a comprehensive drug strategy in Vancouver); rejected by New York Medical Society.
- 1955** New York Academy of Medicine proposes maintenance program, emphasizing that patients who are “continuously refractory to therapy should be supplied the minimum amount of their drug needs.”
- 1957** Joint Committee on Narcotic Study of the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association suggests operating outpatient maintenance facilities on a controlled experimental basis.
- 1965** Methadone is clinically developed and introduced in the United States.
- 1971** Vera Institute proposes heroin maintenance pilot program for New York City, in which patients would receive heroin for about three months before transitioning to methadone or an abstinence regime. President Nixon officially declares a “War on Drugs,” identifying drug abuse as “Public Enemy #1.”
- 1977** National League of Cities holds Heroin Maintenance Policy Seminar under grant from the Drug Abuse Council.
- 1991** A referendum in Basel, Switzerland garners the support of 65% of the voters for a heroin-prescription program, in the hope of reducing criminal activity and the spread of disease.
- 1994** Switzerland begins a trial heroin maintenance program (the PROVE study) for users who have failed multiple withdrawal programs.
- 1998** Professor David Vlahov of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health suggests maintenance trials for Baltimore.
From 1998-2001, the Netherlands conducts a HAT trial.

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- 2003** A heroin prescription study is conducted in Germany between 2003 and 2005. Randomized controlled heroin assisted treatment trial is implemented in Granada (Andalusia) between 2003 and 2004.
- 2004** Experimental heroin maintenance trial is implemented in Barcelona, Spain between 2004 and 2006 among a small sample of inpatient heroin addicts with previous exposure to MMT. The Dutch government supports the approval of HAT as regular addiction treatment alongside other existing interventions.
- 2005** The North American Opiate Medication Initiative (NAOMI) begins recruitment and is implemented in Montreal and Vancouver, Canada. Britain initiates a controlled heroin maintenance trial, the Randomised Injecting Opioid Treatment Trial (RIOTT), which recruits heroin users who have had poor outcomes with MMT. Results released in 2009 indicate positive response in: retention, abstinence from street heroin, reduction of crime, and improved physical, mental health and social functioning.
- 2006** The Dutch Medicines Evaluation Board approves heroin as a medicinal product for the treatment of poorly functioning, therapy-resistant heroin addicts who are characterized by daily heroin use and have not responded to treatment.
- 2008** A national referendum in Switzerland to permit heroin maintenance countrywide passes with 68% of voters in support.
- 2009** Peter Reuter publishes “Can Heroin Maintenance Help Baltimore?” for The Abell Foundation, which suggests that Baltimore might benefit from a heroin assisted treatment program. Germany’s parliament allows heroin assisted treatment to become available in the country as a therapeutic option for severely dependent heroin users. New England Journal of Medicine publishes groundbreaking NAOMI study, which finds that prescription heroin leads to reduction of crime and overdose deaths.
- 2010** Considering the evidence in other countries conclusive, Denmark proceeds directly with a heroin-assisted treatment program, rather than trials.

The Drug Policy Alliance is the nation's leading organization working to end the war on drugs. We envision a just society in which the use and regulation of drugs are grounded in science, compassion, health, and human rights. Our mission is to advance those policies and attitudes that best reduce the harms of both drug misuse and drug prohibition and to promote the sovereignty of individuals over their minds and bodies.