

# Breaking Down Barriers to Accessing Internationally Controlled Essential Medicines Key to Ending Pain and Suffering of Millions

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Global experts, gathered in Amsterdam this week at a meeting organised by [Health Action International](#) (HAI), agreed on a path to working together more closely to tackle barriers to access to internationally controlled essential medicines (ICEMs) that leave millions suffering in unnecessary pain and anguish.

Spanning the varied fields of pain and palliative care, epilepsy, harm reduction, mental health, obstetrics, anaesthesiology and human rights, it was the first time such a diverse group of experts have been brought together to discuss the common challenge of access to these medicines.

Globally, 5.5 billion people cannot access essential opioids, and more than six million people die in unbearable pain each year because they cannot access pain treatment. Meanwhile, tens of millions more living with epilepsy do not receive the medicines they need, and 80% of people with severe mental health disorders living in low- and middle-income countries receive no treatment at all.

HAI Research Manager, Gaby Ooms, said:

‘There are shameful global inconsistencies in access to ICEMs. At the same time, there are dedicated and passionate advocates and healthcare professionals out there fighting to change the situation.’

Reflecting on three days of passionate discussion on this emotive issue, HAI Executive Director, Dr Tim Reed, commented:

‘It’s been a great privilege for HAI to facilitate this innovative and refreshing look at controlled medicines and tease out the synergies between all of the actors engaged in the use of these vital medicines.’

Given the many areas of overlap found in barriers to access to ICEMs, the assembled experts from across disciplines agreed to set up a hub for information sharing as a first step in the effort to reach their common goal: improving access to these essential medicines.

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