

“Learning Together, Adapt and Adopt”

**Maximizing Business Value: Supporting
Harm Reduction for Confronting HIV, TB,
and Drug Use in Southeast Asia**

AHRA

Introduction

Southeast Asia is confronted with a profound drugs and health crisis. The health crisis fueled by HIV, viral hepatitis C (HCV), tuberculosis (TB), and drug use, and drug dependency has profound economic ramifications, with the dual challenges of drug-related harm and health disparities, impacting individuals, businesses, and communities alike.

Harm reduction is a public health approach that aims to minimize the negative consequences associated with drug use, while recognizing that these behaviors may continue to occur. It focuses on pragmatic strategies to reduce harm. By implementing harm reduction initiatives, businesses can play a pivotal role in addressing pressing health challenges such as HIV, tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis C (HCV), and drug dependency.

Understanding Economic Impacts:

The economic impact of HIV, TB, and substance use in the workplace is substantial:

1. **HIV and AIDS:** These conditions cause significant **loss of earnings** due to the deaths of workers that could be avoided by prevention and treatment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights the **billions of dollars** lost in earnings because of HIV and AIDS.

2. **Substance Use and Dependency:** Drug use and dependency has a considerable impact on workplaces. Researchers estimate that **lost work, healthcare costs, and lost productivity** due to drug use and dependency cost businesses **\$81 billion** annually. Lost productivity and absenteeism resulting from drug use contribute significantly to this cost.

3. **TB and TB/HIV Prevention in the Workplace:** The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of engaging the business sector in TB and TB/HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and care. The cost of Tuberculosis in the workplace worldwide is estimated at **US\$ 12 billion** every year, the impact on workforce health and profitability is recognized globally.

4. **Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) significantly impacts workforce productivity**, while exact global figures vary, one study citing a staggering **\$5.5 billion annual cost** in the United States from absenteeism alone. Untreated HCV leads to absenteeism and presenteeism, with estimated annual costs reaching billions. Beyond lost productivity, businesses shoulder hefty healthcare expenses for HCV treatment, including diagnostics, medications, and supportive care. Moreover, advanced HCV can result in long-term disability and premature workforce departure, posing a loss of valuable human capital.

5. **The global drug overdose pandemic** presents substantial challenges for economic productivity and business efficacy. Substance use, especially opioid consumption, undermines workforce productivity by reducing output, increasing absenteeism, and impairing decision-making. With profound implications for both public health and economic productivity, the United States faces an astounding annual cost of \$1 trillion due to overdose deaths alone, imposing significant financial burdens on businesses.