



Injecting drug use in South(ern) Africa

Realities and the need for action

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Disclosures

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Overview

- Concepts & terms
- Drug use in South Africa
- Why do people inject drugs?
- What risks do people who inject drugs face?
- What solutions are there?
- The regional situation
- Conclusions & recommendations



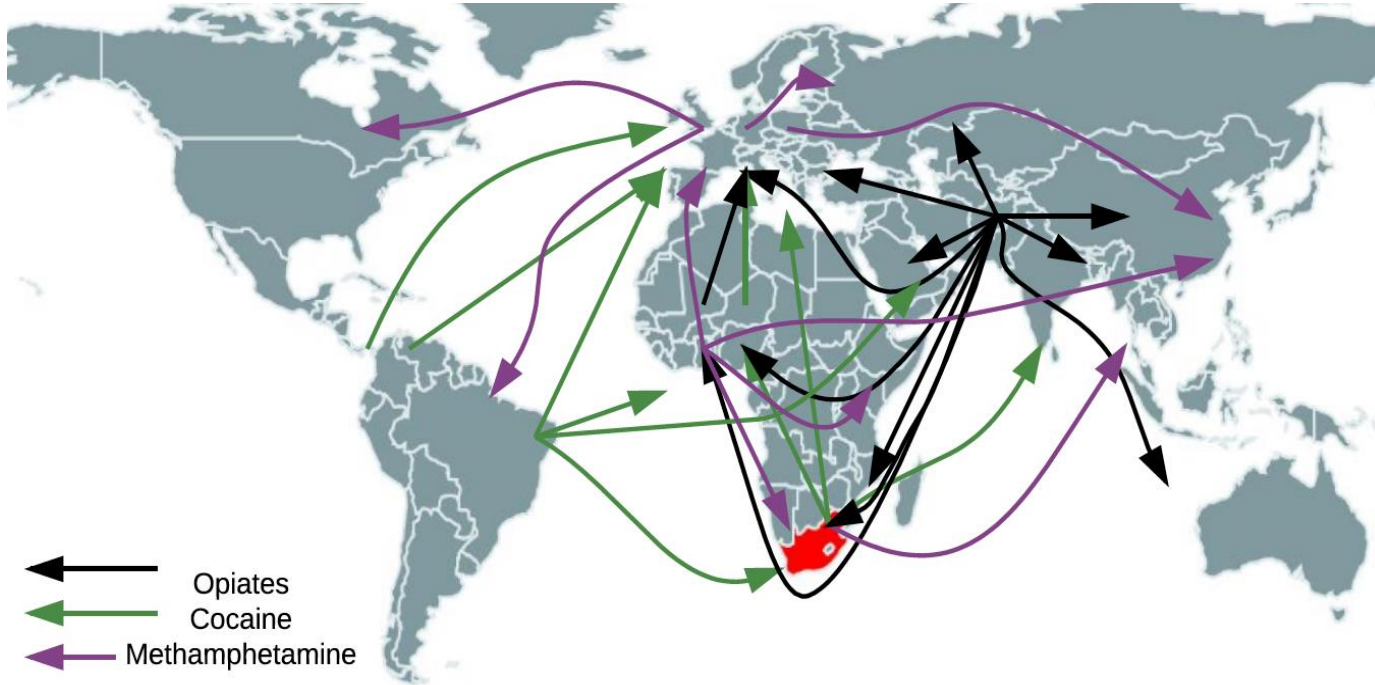
Source: TB HIV Care 2018

What is a drug?

Why do people use drugs?

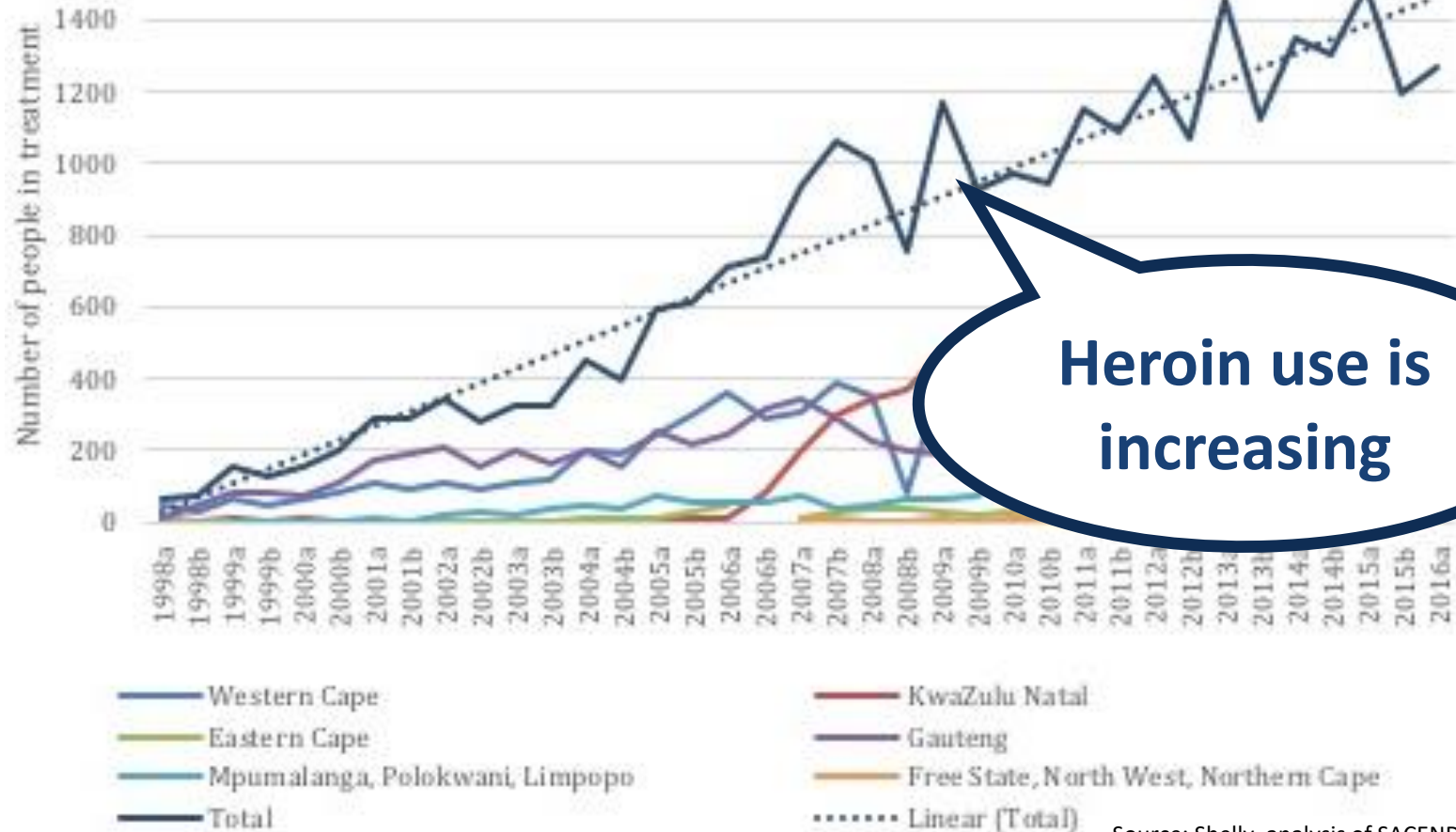
**The war on drugs has been a
war on people**

South Africa is part of (injectable) drug trafficking



Adapted from World Drug Report 2015
* Several routes involving other regions not shown

Heroin related admissions, SACENDU sites (1998 – 2016)



Source: Shelly, analysis of SACENDU data 2018

Why do people inject drugs?

What risks are associated with injecting?





Source: Anova Health Institute 2018

DRUG USE

DIRECT RISK

- Needle & syringe reuse
- Ineffective cleaning
- Sharing

INDIRECT RISK

- High risk sexual practices
- Low levels of knowledge
- Limited access to appropriate services
- Violence
- Stigma, discrimination & exclusion
- Drug use in unsafe environments

HCV & HIV
Infection

Sibo's experience of the criminal justice system...



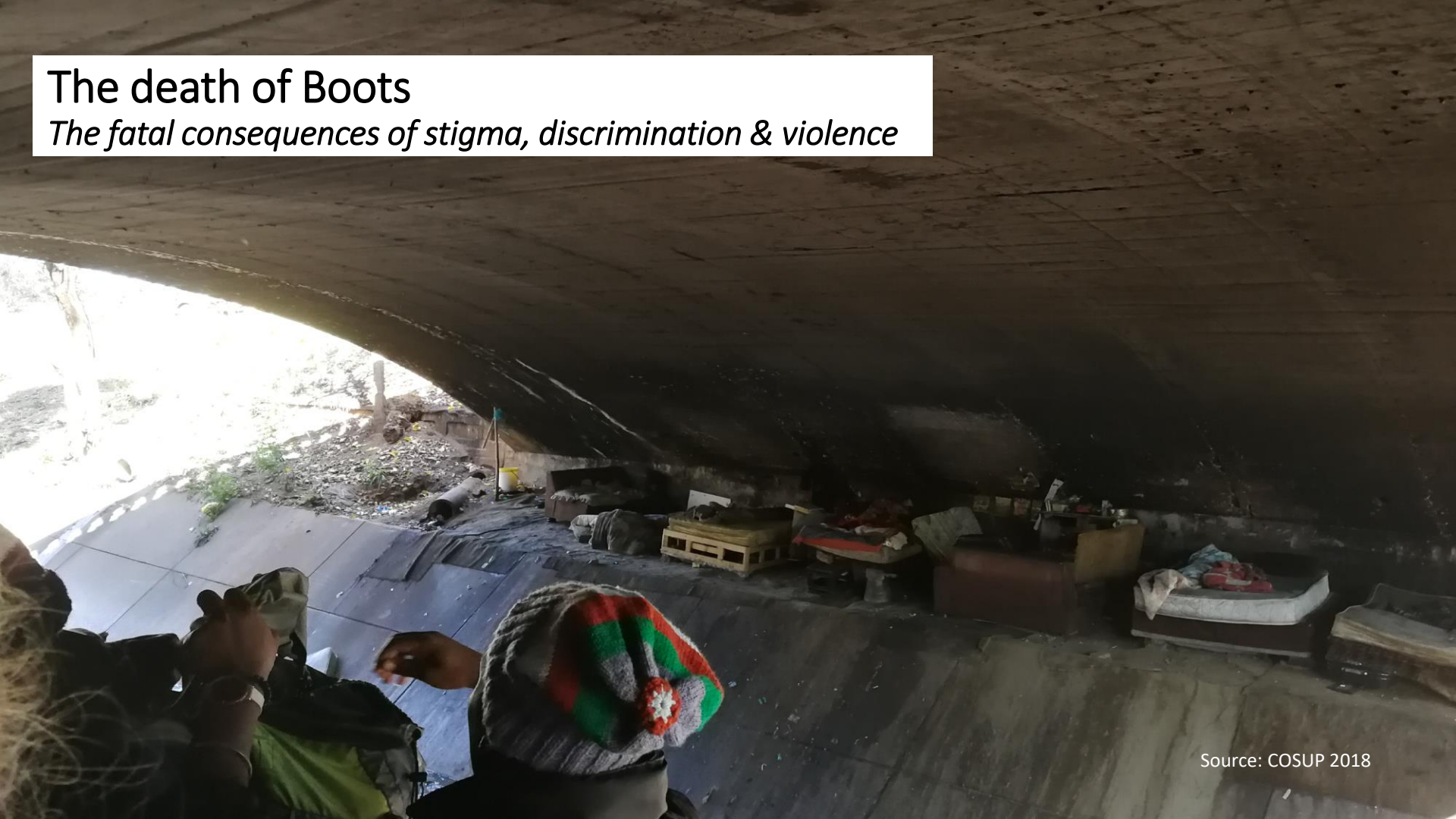
Source: Anova Health Institute 2018

Charlize explains what happened to her when the eThekweni municipality halted the needle and syringe service in Durban?

My name is [REDACTED] and I have
really been suffering tremendously
since we do not receive needles at
T.B.H. I have hepatitis C and I'm HIV+
and I have to end up sharing needles
with my partner because we can't
afford to purchase needles from the
pharmacy. Therefore I put my partner
at risk every time we use. The
statistics are so high for HIV
in S.A. and now they will ~~only~~ rise
because of this situation.

The death of Boots

The fatal consequences of stigma, discrimination & violence



Source: COSUP 2018

Barriers to health services

- Prior experiences of stigmatisation

“They’re not helping you, they’re oppressing you” (Male, Pretoria, 32)

“When [the doctor] heard I was using drugs he went off!... It was the worst experience I have ever had with a doctor. ” (Male, Cape Town, 30)

- Concerns about waiting periods, withdrawal & treatment access
- Affected by prior negative experiences & low sense of self-worth
“Death didn’t seem that unappealing.” (Male, Cape Town, 45)

Source: Versfeld et al. 2018

What solutions are there?

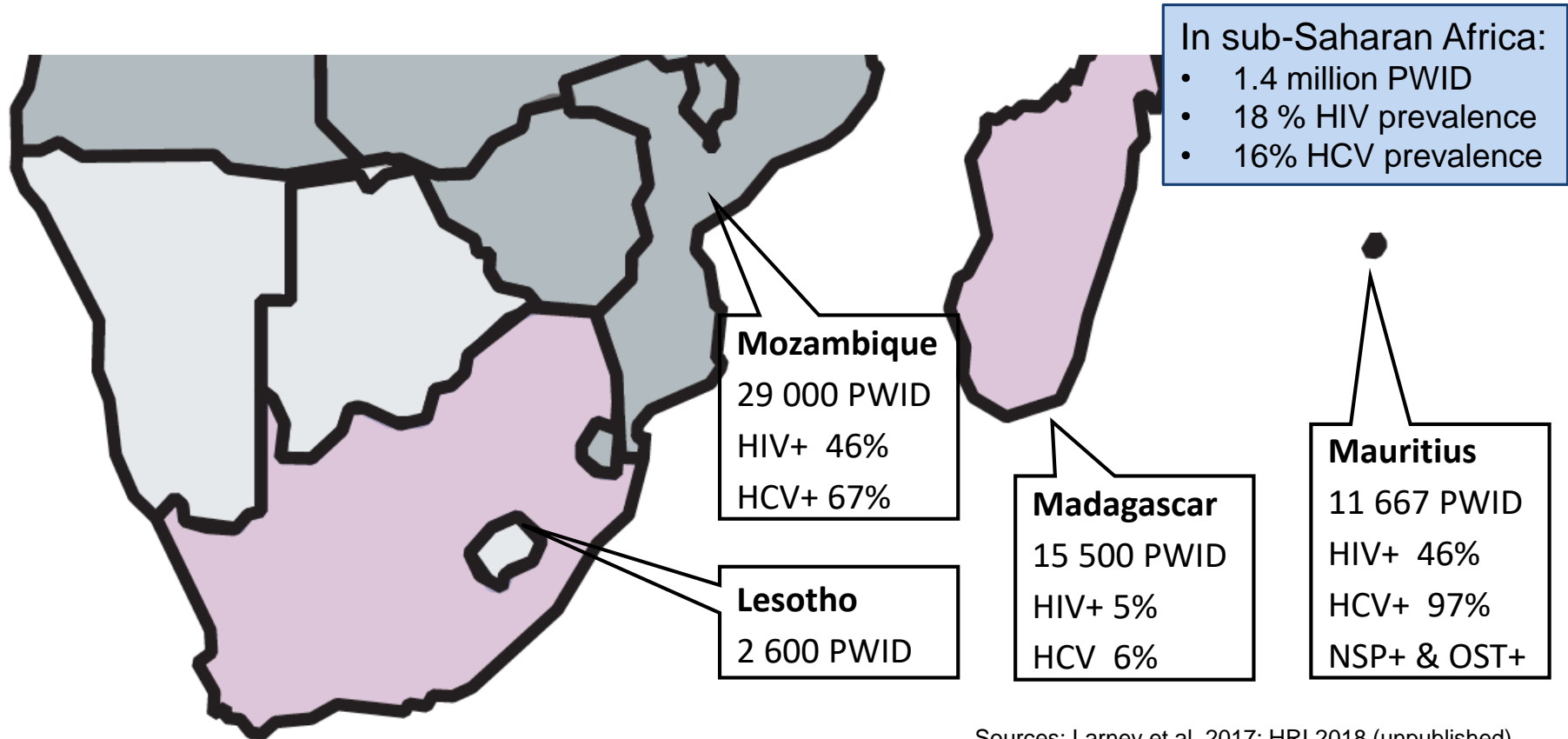
WHO, UNODC, UNAIDS comprehensive package of interventions:

1. Needle and syringe programmes (NSPs)
 2. Opioid substitution therapy (OST) and other evidence-based drug dependence treatment
 3. HIV testing and counselling (HTC)
 4. Antiretroviral therapy (ART)
 5. Prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
 6. Condom programmes for people who inject drugs and their sexual partners
 7. Targeted information, education and communication (IEC) for people who inject drugs and their sexual partners
 8. Prevention, vaccination, diagnosis and treatment for viral hepatitis
 9. Prevention, diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis (TB)
- Opioid overdose prevention and management



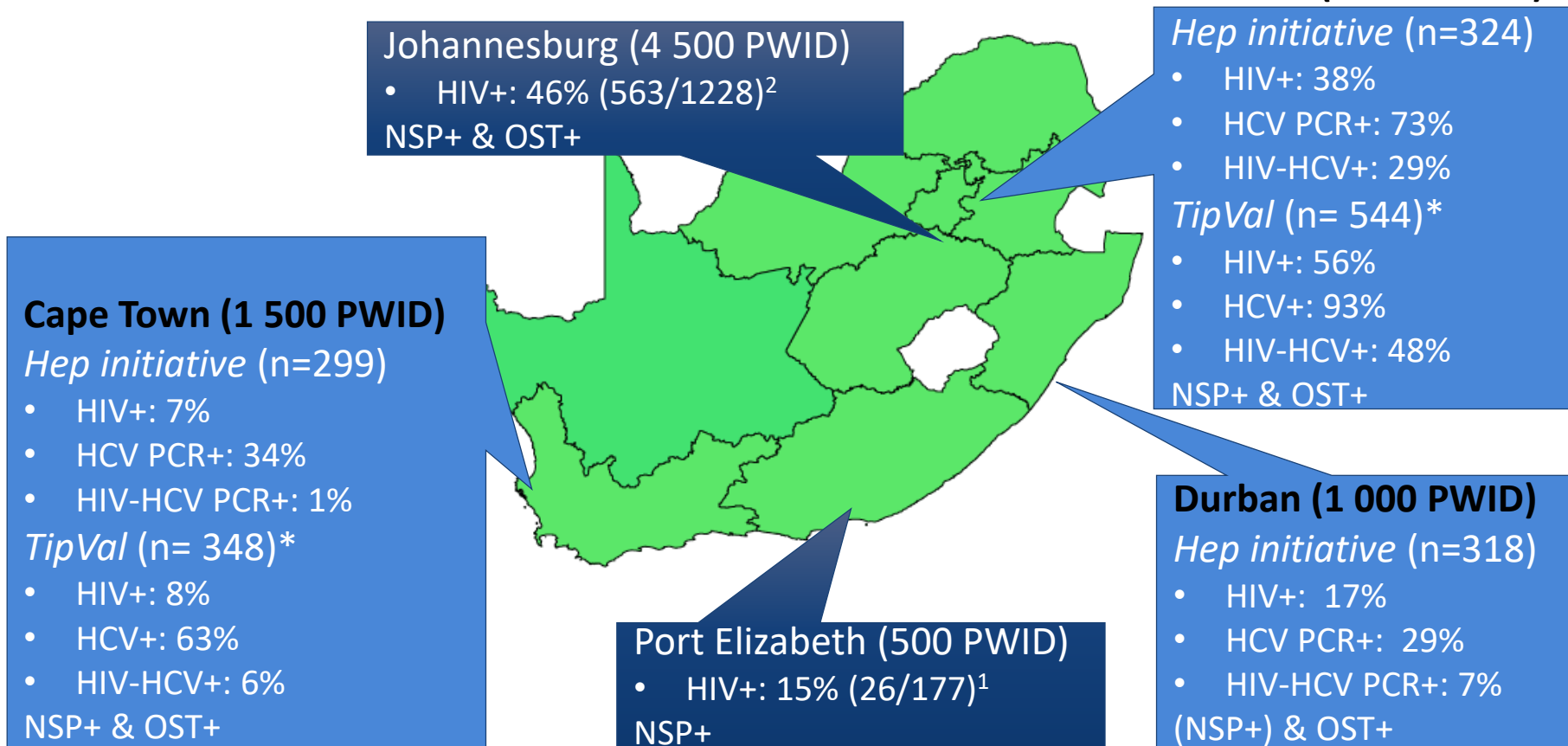
The Southern African situation

PWID size, HIV & HCV prevalence estimates and services



Sources: Larney et al. 2017; HRI 2018 (unpublished)

South African HIV/HCV data & services



Naz is hopeful



Conclusions & recommendations

- PWID exist, and social & structural factors are major contributors to the high HIV & HCV prevalence and consequences of infection
- (Co)-Infection burden varies, likely reflecting contextual factors
- Needle and syringe programmes, opioid substitution therapy and a harm reduction approach is critical to reduce HIV, HCV and other harms
- Voluntary psychosocial services are needed to build a sense of self-worth, dignity and the desire to access and remain in treatment
- Clinicians & the health and social system need to provide accessible, sensitized, evidence-based and integrated community-based services
- HIV clinicians should call for the decriminalisation of people who use drugs, with a move towards legal regulation

Thank you

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