



GGD Amsterdam

Welcome speech reception LEPH 2016 (2 October, Rode Hoed)

My name is Paul van der Velpen and I am the Director of the Public Health Service of Amsterdam. On behalf of the Public Health Service (of Amsterdam), I would like to welcome you to the third International Conference of Law Enforcement and Public Health.

But above all, I would like to welcome you to Amsterdam, 'my' City, since I was actually born and raised here, in Amsterdam. We lived above a well known bar in the Nieuwmarkt, the *Cotton Club*. (It was, incidentally, one of the first bars in the 50's where you could buy marihuana.) We felt safe there. But when the heroin epidemic in the city progressed and the violence in the neighbourhood increased, it turned more threatening. This change in our neighbourhood happened in the first half of my study, in the early 1970's. We wanted to leave, move to a better neighbourhood. A little later in that period the Public Health Service, together with the police, took action in the city centre. This was new: an insight into each other's departments, and working together. There were buildings being squatted by drug users. This was not just a law and order problem. A Public Health Service doctor and an outreach worker began consultation hours in the buildings and reported to the City officials that most of the drug users didn't make use of the existing help facilities, and that there was a major need for medical and social assistance. It was a period of all kinds of change, including the introduction of a mobile methadone clinic called the methadone bus. Sometime later the needle exchange was introduced to prevent the spread of infectious diseases; an exciting combination of public health, enforcement and sanction.

That period in Amsterdam laid the foundation for the now long-standing cooperation between the police and the health authorities. A collaboration that is fairly unique in the Netherlands, but also internationally.

And there are constantly developments in our capital that underline the relevance of our cooperation with the police, justice and public order. We have seen and experienced this since the last LEPH (*uitspreken*: el- i-pi- aige) conference in Amsterdam in 2014. For example, on the 25th of November 2014, right after the conference, two young British tourists died in a hotel room here in Amsterdam, after inhaling white heroin that was sold as cocaine by a street dealer. Their bodies were found less than a month after another British tourist had died in similar circumstances. At least 17 other people had medical treatment after taking white heroin that year. Under the direction of the City Hall and the Public Health Service a major information campaign for tourists and citizens was set up. There were large screens placed all over the city to warn people, and to motivate them to seek help when necessary, they were assured that they would not be prosecuted by the police.

And there is continued interest from the City Hall in the development of the so-called 'personalized approach' for crime and serious nuisance. We now not only have the 'Top 600 approach'; (a program for 600 violent repeat offenders) there is also a Top 400 approach, as well as an extreme neighbourhood harassment approach (Treiteraapak; this conference),

Criminal Families, Hooligans, and Domestic Violence approach. Over and over again as the Public Health Service we try to firmly position ourselves in view of the different types of subjects and participate in the frontline by offering our screening and care guidance.

Therefore I am pleased that we as the Public Health Service, as in 2014, could help in organizing this conference. And I believe that this edition will again prove to be a success. There are several reasons for this, and here I will mention three:

In the first place this is an excellent platform for us as the Public Health Service to show in how many diverse areas my co-workers work with the police. Many (inter) national congresses cover single professions or disciplines but that is not a precise characteristic of the work that we do. To say the least, our work is multi-disciplinary.

In the second place it is also in our interests to innovate, to continue to come up with new ideas, if necessary, from abroad. We're doing well in Amsterdam, working well, but Amsterdam is not the forerunner anymore on all fronts. For example in other countries we see initiatives for 'street triage teams'. This we'll be hearing more of in this conference; and we will definitely take a look at that.

The main reason, however, is that we the Public Health Service and the police see and handle problems that are simply not unique to Amsterdam. I think of the refugee situation, the youth radicalization prospect and the emerging and recurring terrorist threats. It is necessary to share and exchange information on how these problems are handled in other countries.

Dear people, dear guests, it now only remains for me to wish you an inspiring and fruitful conference. Thank you for your attention and thank you for coming to our beautiful city. Good Bye.