

Standardising drug-use disorder treatment and rehabilitation *in Sierra Leone*

*We serve **PEOPLE**
not just the **LAW***



DRUG-USE DISORDER

Treatment and Rehabilitation

Regulatory Framework

May, 2026



Sierra Leone National Drug Law Enforcement Agency

CONTENTS

1) Preamble	1
2) Guiding Principles	1
3) Objectives	2
4) Scope	2
5) Categories of Licence	2
(a) Residential-in-patient	2
(b) Non-residential – outpatient	2
(i) Grade 'A'	2
(ii) Grade 'B'	2
(iii) Grade 'C'	2
6) Application for Licence	2
6.1 Any individual or cooperate body intending to establish.	
6.2 Purchase application form:.....	2
6.3 Submitting application form:.....	2
6.4 Processing application:.....	3
(a) Review of application:.....	3
(b) Inspection of premises:.....	3
6.5 Recommendation for issuance and refusal of licence.....	3
6.6 Refusal of licence.....	3
6.7 Issuance of licence	3
6.8 Validity of licence	4
6.9 Renewal of licence	4
6.10 Upgrading licence	4
6.11 Suspension of licence	4
6.12 Primary Grounds for Suspension.....	4
6.13 The Suspension Process	4
6.14 Hearings and Appeals:	4
6.15 Consequences of Suspension	5
7. Fees	
7.1 Application fee	5
7.2 Licensing fee	5
7.3 Renewal fee	5
8. Organisation and Management	6
(a) Governing Body	6
(b)) Medical Professionals	6
(c) Counsellors and Therapists	6
(d)) Support Staff	6
(e) Management and Leadership	6
(f) Other Specialists	6

(g)	Qualifications and Experience -----	6
9.	Standard Protocols for Treatment and Rehabilitation -----	6
(a)	Multi-disciplinary/holistic model -----	6
(b)	Hazelden-Minnesota model -----	6
(c)	Traditional and spiritual model -----	6
9.2	Standard procedures and services -----	7
9.3	Other specialised healthcare services may include but are not limited to:-----	7
9.4	Specialised social welfare services for people with drug use disorders -----	7
9.5	Long-term residential services for people with drug use disorders -----	7
10.	Location and Building Safety -----	7
10.1	Facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders-----	7
10.2	Space & Layout -----	7
10.3	Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH) -----	8
10.4	Electricity & Utilities -----	8
10.5	Fire & Emergency Safety -----	8
11.	Safety and Security -----	8
12.	Human Rights of Clients -----	9
12.1	Human rights policy -----	9
13.	Enforcement -----	9
14.	Review of regulatory framework -----	10
15.	Resources -----	10



1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1 According to Section 3(1)(a) of The National Drug Control Act 2008 (NDC Act 2008), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) should lead and coordinate ALL matters related to drug control, including the eradication of drug abuse, its primary causes, illicit drug supply, and drug-related crime.
- 1.2 Section 3(1)(b) of the NDC Act (2008) also empowers the agency to coordinate all drug-related regulations, including the regulation of drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities.
- 1.3 The Minister of Internal Affairs must approve treatment and rehabilitation facilities for drug use disorders by issuing a licence through the NDLEA.
- 1.4 Any person or corporate body that establishes, operates, or maintains a drug treatment and rehabilitation centre in Sierra Leone without a licence issued by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), in accordance with the requirements of this regulation and Sections 29, 30, 31, and 32 of the National Drug Control Act 2008, commits an offence under the Act.
- 1.5 This document, titled "Drug-Use Disorders Treatment and Rehabilitation Regulatory Framework" was, therefore, formulated by the NDLEA in accordance with the provisions of "The National Drug Control Act, 2008 with the aim of standardising drug treatment and rehabilitation, assisting individuals with drug use disorders in overcoming their addictions, and maintaining social order.
- 1.6 This document is based on currently available scientific evidence on treatment for drug use disorders. However, considering our country's social and cultural background, the document allows for the use of spiritual and traditional treatment methods as long as they address the needs of people at various stages and levels of drug use disorders and follow international best practices for treating these disorders.
- 1.7 The Standards are aspirational, and as such, facilities for treating and rehabilitating drug use disorders are not expected to meet all the standards and recommendations made in this document all at once. However, over time, progressive quality improvement, with "evidence-based and ethical practice" as an objective, can and should be expected to achieve better organised, effective, and ethical systems and services for those with drug use disorders.
- 1.8 NDLEA invites owners and operators of facilities for treating drug use disorders to use this document as a framework to guide their operations and service delivery. While many principles and standards of these regulations may also apply to the treatment of other mental and substance use disorders (such as those due to alcohol and nicotine use), the Standards' primary area of focus is on drug use disorders.
- 1.9 The document provides an overview, but it does not aim to provide all the necessary details about the functions and services of the treatment and rehabilitation centre for drug use disorders. However, the agency considers that additional tools, such as treatment guidelines, capacity-building materials, and toolkits for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, can be used for these purposes. The regulations maintain a degree of flexibility to ensure their applicability to different social, cultural, and legal frameworks.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Treatment should be available, accessible, attractive, and appropriate
- 2.2 Ensuring ethical standards of care in treatment services
- 2.3 Promoting treatment for drug use disorders through effective coordination between the criminal justice system and health and social services
- 2.4 Treatment should be based on scientific evidence and respond to the specific needs of individuals with drug use disorders
- 2.5 Ensuring good clinical governance of treatment services and programmes for drug use disorders

3. OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 To ensure quality, safety, and effectiveness of drug treatment and rehabilitation services in Sierra Leone

4. SCOPE

- 5.1 These regulations apply to all centres for treating and rehabilitating drug use disorders in Sierra Leone.

5. CATEGORIES OF LICENCE

- 5.1 The agency recognises two broad categories of facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders, under which three graded licences will be issued.

- (a) Residential – in-patient and
- (b) Non-residential – outpatient

- 5.2 The agency shall issue three grades of licences under each category of treatment and rehabilitation centres for drug use disorders.

- (i) Grade 'A' drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities are those that meet 90–100% of the infrastructural, operational, and treatment protocol requirements set out in this regulation and the NDC Act 2008.
- (ii) Grade B drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities are those that meet 70–80% of the infrastructural, operational, and treatment protocol requirements set out in this regulation.
- (iii) Grade C drug treatment and rehabilitation facilities are those that meet 50–60% of the infrastructural, operational, and treatment protocol requirements set out in this regulation.
- (b) The agency's electronic assessment tools will automatically generate the grade of each facility.
- (c) Facilities that score lower than 50% shall be refused a licence.

6. APPLICATION FOR LICENCE

- 6.1 Any individual or corporate body intending to establish, operate, or maintain an approved treatment and rehabilitation centre for drug use disorders must meet the following preliminary requirements:

- (a) Obtain a business permit from the Office of the Administrator and Registrar General (OARG) or the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) for incorporation.
- (b) Obtain a Tax Identification Number (TIN) from the National Revenue Authority (NRA).
- (c) Obtain a business permit from their local council
- (d) Obtain a valid work and residential permit for a non-citizen.
- (e) Obtain Police clearance for owner(s)

- 6.2 Purchase application form:

- (a) Applicant pays application fee to approved NDLEA bank account
- (b) Applicant presents bank deposit slip to the agency
- (c) The agency confirms the applicant's payment of the application fee.
- (d) The agency issues the application form and checklist to the applicant.

- 6.3 Submitting application form:

- (a) The applicant completes the application form and submits it to the agency along with copies of the following documents:

- (i) Copies of business permits from the Office of the Administrator and Registrar General (OARG) or the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).
- (ii) Copies of business registration with local council
- (iii) National Revenue Authority (NRA) Tax Clearance
- (iv) The information includes the name, location, and contact details for the centre
- (v) The organogram of the centre
- (vi) The staff's qualifications and experience are also listed.
- (vii) The centre's treatment protocols and services are also included.
- (viii) The centre's safety and security measures.

6.4 Processing application

- (a) Review of application:
 - (i) The agency shall review all applications in line with the provisions of these regulations, Section 26(1) and (2), and Section 29(1) and (2) of the National Drug Control Act 2008.
 - (ii) The agency shall inform applicants of the status of their application in writing not later than 10 working days from the date it was submitted.
- (b) Inspection of premises:
 - (i) After the review, the agency shall request the inspection of the premises to ensure that it meets the requirements of a modern facility for treating drug use disorders and rehabilitation as outlined in this regulatory framework.
 - (ii) The agency and the applicant shall agree on a date for the inspection not later than 10 working days from the day the request was made.
 - (iii) Notwithstanding (i) and (ii), according to Section 29(1) of the NDC Act (2008), an inspector can enter the treatment centre at any reasonable time, with any necessary help, to inspect the premises.

6.5 Recommendation for issuance and refusal of licence

- (a) The Inspector shall compile a report based on their findings from the review and inspection of the centre premises and make a recommendation to the Executive Director for the issuance or refusal of a licence to the applicant.
- (b) The Executive Director's decision to refuse or issue a licence to an applicant shall be based on the applicant's score and the inspector's recommendations.

6.6 Refusal of licence

- (a) Applicants who do not meet the 50% requirement threshold for infrastructural, operational and treatment protocol thresholds shall be refused a licence.
- (b) The Executive Director shall communicate his/her decision in writing, clearly stating the reasons for refusal.
- (c) The applicant and the agency shall agree on a stipulated date to improve on the reasons why they did not qualify for a licence.

6.7 Issuance of licence

- (a) Applicants who qualify for a licence shall be notified in writing by the Executive Director, clearly stating the grade of licence for which they qualify and seeking their consent to issue an offer letter.
- (b) If the applicant consents, the Executive Director will issue an offer letter to the applicant that specifies the category and grade of the licence they qualify for, along with the terms and conditions of the licence.
- (c) The Executive Director will issue payment instructions to applicants who ac-

cept the offer.

- (d) The Executive Director will issue a licence as specified in the offer letter to the applicant who presents evidence of payment to the agency.

6.8 Validity of licence

- (i) Licenses issued under this regulatory framework shall be valid for 12 months ONLY from the date of issuance.
- (ii) A licence issued under this regulatory framework shall be issued to a specific licens-ee for a specific location and shall NOT be transferable. The licence shall be issued ONLY for the premises and the individual owner or corporate entity responsible for its governance.
- (iii) Licensees may only provide services within the specific category and grade of facility for which they have been licensed.

6.9 Renewal of licence

- (a) Licensees wishing to renew their licence must notify the agency in writing 60 days before the expiration of their current licence.
- (b) The agency and the applicant shall agree on a date for the agency to inspect the premises in relation to their application.
- (c) Following the inspection and review of the applicant's level of compliance with the regulatory framework, the inspector shall make recommendations to the Executive Director, who shall award or refuse the issuance of the licence in accordance with 6.7.

6.10 Upgrading licence

- (a) Holders of a certain grade of licence shall act in accordance with 6.9 if they desire to upgrade to a higher grade.

6.11 Suspension of licence

- (a) The suspension of a licence to operate a drug treatment and rehabilitation centre is a regulatory action taken by the agency when a centre fails to meet safety, operational, or ethical standards. This action temporarily stops the centre from admitting new patients and can be a precursor to permanent revocation.

6.12 Primary Grounds for Suspension

- (a) Any situation that poses a significant risk to the health, safety, or welfare of residents, including abuse or neglect.
- (b) Violations of operating standards, such as improper documentation, falsification of documentation, administration of expired medications, or poor sanitation.
- (c) Personnel lacking the necessary education, certifications, or supervision may be employed.
- (d) Violation of fire protection, safety, or building codes.
- (e) Denying or refusing inspectors access to the facility or records.
- (f) The offence also includes submitting false information in licence applications or engaging in financial misconduct.
- (g) Offering services under the category for which they were not licensed makes them guilty of an offence, and they shall pay a fine of Le10,000.

6.13 The Suspension Process

- (a) The agency shall notify the operator in writing regarding the suspension, stating the date and the specific reasons for it.
- (b) In cases of severe danger, a "summary suspension" may be ordered, requiring

immediate cessation of business before a formal hearing.

6.14 Severe danger shall constitute, but not be limited to:

- (a) Physical harm
- (b) Drug use or abuse
- (c) Sale of drugs on the premises

6.15 Hearings and Appeals:

- (a) The licensee may request an administrative hearing to challenge the suspension, present evidence, or dispute errors in their records.
- (b) The licensee is generally given a right to a prompt hearing within 8 to 30 days from the issuance of the suspension notice to contest the suspension.
- (c) The Executive Director shall constitute a panel consisting of the Executive Director, the 2 Inspectors (who reported the issue), 2 administrators of the Licensee and 2 patients of the centre.
- (d) The Executive Director or his/her appointee will preside over the hearing.
- (e) The Executive Director shall make the final decision based on the evidence provided by the parties.
- (f) Such a decision shall take effect immediately after the hearing.

6.16 Consequences of Suspension

- (a) Temporary Cessation of Care: The facility must stop accepting new patients and may be required to relocate current residents (at the cost of the suspended licence).
- (b) Take administrative action against perpetrators.
- (c) Relocate patients.
- (d) Reporting Requirements: The facility is often required to notify stakeholders, including patients, family members, and funding agencies.
- (e) Financial and Legal Penalties: Continued operation during suspension can result in further fines and permanent revocation pursuant to the provision of the National Drug Control Act 2008.
- (f) Reinstatement: A suspended licence can usually be reinstated once the centre demonstrates that it has met all safety requirements and corrected its deficiencies.
- (g) Corrective Action Plan: The facility must usually submit a plan of correction to address identified violations.

7. FEES

7.1 Application fee

- (a) Fees for application form shall be Le 500

7.2 Licensing fee

- (a) Grade 'A' facilities - Le10,000
- (b) Grade 'B' facilities - Le7,000
- (c) Grade 'C' facilities - Le5,000

7.3 Renewal fee

- (a) Grade 'A' facilities - Le5,000
- (b) Grade 'B' facilities - Le3,000
- (c) Grade 'C' facilities - Le2,500

8. ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

8.1 Facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders in all categories and grades of licence, and regardless of their treatment modalities, shall have the following personnel:

- (a) Governing Body
 - (i) Board
 - (ii) Management
 - (iii) Staff
 - (iv) Volunteers
- (b) Medical Professionals:
 - (i) Doctors (Psychiatrists or General Practitioners)
 - (ii) Nurses (Psychiatric or General)
 - (iii) Pharmacists
- (c) Counsellors and Therapists:
 - (i) Addiction Counsellors
 - (ii) Psychologists
 - (iii) Social Workers
 - (iv) Occupational Therapists
- (d) Support Staff:
 - (i) Caregivers or Support Workers
 - (ii) Administrative Staff
 - (iii) Security Personnel
- (e) Management and Leadership:
 - (i) Centre Manager or Director
 - (ii) Clinical Supervisor
- (f) Other Specialists:
 - (i) Nutritionists or Dieticians
 - (ii) Fitness or Exercise Therapists
- (g) Qualifications and Experience:
 - (i) Relevant degrees and certifications (e.g., medicine, nursing, psychology, social work)
 - (ii) Experience in addiction treatment or related fields
 - (iii) Training in areas like mental health, counselling, or substance abuse treatment

8.2 The staff ratio to patients shall be calculated by the agency depending on the number of patients per time, the needs of the patients, the size of the facility and the services they provide.

9. STANDARD PROTOCOLS FOR TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION

9.1 The agency recognises these three models for drug treatment and rehabilitation.

- (a) Multi-disciplinary/holistic model
- (b) Hazelden-Minnesota model
- (c) Traditional and spiritual model

9.2 Licence holders may use any or all these categories as long as it meets the needs of their patients.

9.3 Notwithstanding, all drug use disorders, treatment and rehabilitation facilities MUST offer the following procedures and services as the fundamental steps to addressing all forms of drug use disorders.

- (a) Assessment
- (b) Treatment planning
- (c) Case management
- (d) Detoxification/withdrawal management
- (e) Psychosocial interventions
- (f) Medication-assisted treatment
- (g) Relapse prevention
- (h) Recovery management

9.4 Other specialised healthcare services may include but are not limited to:

- (a) Intervention by specialists in mental health services (including psychiatric and psychological services)
- (b) Interventions by specialists in internal medicine, surgery, paediatrics, obstetrics, gynaecology and other specialised health care services
- (c) Dental care
- (d) Treatment of infectious diseases (including HIV, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis)

9.5 Specialised social welfare services for people with drug use disorders

- (a) Family support and reintegration
- (b) Vocational training/education programmes
- (c) Income generation/micro-credits
- (d) Leisure time planning
- (e) Recovery management services

9.6 Long-term residential services for people with drug use disorders

- (a) Residential programme to address severe or complex drug use disorders and comorbid conditions
- (b) Housing
- (c) Vocational training
- (d) Protected environment
- (e) Life skills training
- (f) Ongoing therapeutic support
- (g) Referral to outpatient/recovery management services

10. LOCATION AND BUILDING SAFETY

10.1 Facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders in all categories and grades of licence, and regardless of their treatment modalities, must adhere to the following building and infrastructural requirements:

- (a) Facility shall have a permanent structure approved for institutional or health-care use. Safe distance from environmental hazards
- (b) Compliance with local building and zoning regulations
- (c) Structurally sound walls, roofing, flooring and ceiling

10.2 Space & Layout

The facility shall have clearly defined zones for various functions, including:

- (a) Administration
- (b) Residential accommodation
- (c) Treatment and counselling
- (d) Recreation
- (e) Adequate ventilation and natural lighting
- (f) Unobstructed access routes and emergency exits
- (g) Dormitory-style accommodation with minimum floor space per client
- (h) Adequate bedding and ventilation
- (i) At least one multipurpose room for group activities
- (j) Secure perimeter fencing or boundary
- (k) Basic storage for personal belongings
- (l) Dedicated counselling rooms ensuring confidentiality
- (m) Medical examination room with hand-washing facilities
- (n) Isolation area for short-term medical observation
- (o) Designated kitchen and dining area meeting hygiene standards
- (p) On-site laundry facilities
- (q) Fully equipped medical treatment rooms
- (r) Separate male and female residential wings
- (s) Disability-friendly access (ramps, adapted toilet)
- (t) Secure medication storage room with the appropriate temperature
- (u) Recreational and occupational therapy spaces

10.3 Water, Sanitation & Hygiene (WASH)

- (a) Facility shall have continuous access to safe portable water
- (b) Gender-segregated toilet facilities
- (c) Minimum ratio of toilets and bathrooms to residents
- (d) Functional drainage and waste disposal systems

10.4 Electricity & Utilities

- (a) Facility shall have reliable electricity supply (grid or alternative source)
- (b) Adequate lighting in all rooms and outdoor
- (c) Backup power source for essential services (recommended)

10.5 Fire & Emergency Safety

- (a) The facility shall have a fire extinguisher installed and accessible
- (b) Clearly marked emergency exits
- (c) Basic fire safety signage
- (d) Evacuation plan displayed within the facility

11. SAFETY AND SECURITY

11.1 Facilities for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug use disorders in all categories and grades of licence, and regardless of their treatment modalities, must adhere to the following safety and security measures:

- (a) Trained Staff: Ensure staff are trained in crisis management, de-escalation techniques, and first aid.
- (b) Secure Environment: Design a safe physical environment, minimising the risks of self-harm or escape.

- (c) Risk Assessment: Conduct thorough assessments to identify potential risks and develop customised safety plans.
- (d) Monitoring and Supervision: Provide adequate supervision, especially during high-risk periods (e.g., withdrawal, cravings).
- (e) Confidentiality and Privacy: Protect client confidentiality and privacy to build trust.
- (f) Emergency Response Plan: Have a clear plan for medical emergencies, crises, or security breaches.
- (g) Medication Management: Safely store and administer medications to prevent misuse or overdose.
- (h) Patients' Engagement: The centre should engage their patients in their treatment plans and encourage them to report their observations.
- (i) Regular Reviews: Regularly review and update safety protocols and client plans.
- (j) The facility must use non-confrontational approaches to manage patients' challenging behaviours.
- (k) The facility must provide 24/7 support and supervision for patients and staff.
- (l) We ensure that clients have access to emergency services when needed.

12. HUMAN RIGHTS OF CLIENTS

12.1 Drug use disorders treatment and rehabilitation facilities **MUST** ensure that the human rights of their patients are upheld within and outside their premises.

- (a) Patients must be treated with dignity, respect and empathy.
- (b) The facility must ensure that they obtain informed consent from their patients or representatives and agree to treatment plans, with the right to refuse or withdraw.
- (c) The facility must protect patients' confidentiality and privacy.
- (d) The facility must provide care without discrimination based on drug use, health status, or background.
- (e) The facility must provide clear information about treatment options, rights and responsibilities.
- (f) The facility must involve patients in decisions about their care and treatment plans.
- (g) The facility must ensure the safety of the patients from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- (h) The facility must provide access to essential medical care, counselling, and social support.
- (i) The facility must provide culturally sensitive and gender-responsive care.
- (j) The facility must respect the patient's autonomy and self-determination.

12.2 Human rights policy

- (a) The facility must establish a patient human rights policy and ensure that its provisions are clearly communicated to patients, staff and other stakeholders.

13. ENFORCEMENT

13.1 Fines and penalties

- (a) Fines and penalties of this framework shall be imposed in line with the provisions of the NDC Act 2008 and any other associated legislation.

13.2 Monitoring and evaluation

- (a) The agency shall periodically review documentations and the premises of drug use disorders treatment and rehabilitation facilities.

13.3 Capacity building and technical support

- (a) The agency shall provide capacity-building services and technical support to facilities for drug use disorders treatment and rehabilitation at the cost of the facility.

14. REVIEW OF regulatory framework

- 14.1 The agency and relevant stakeholders will periodically review this framework as need arises.

15. RESOURCES

15.1 *The National Drug Control Act 2008*

15.2 *The Public Health Act, 2022*

15.3 *Rules and Regulations for Licensing Rehabilitation Hospital Centres*

15.4 *UNODC/WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders*

15.5 *https://risos-apa-production-public.s3.amazonaws.com/DOH/REG_12204_20211223091509.pdf*

15.6 *This Manual of Operations for Drug Abuse Treatment and Rehabilitation Centers*