

In September 2024, Melbourne welcomed the ISBRA-APSAAR 2024 World Congress on Alcohol and Addictions, which was held at the Convention Centre. John Saunders (Universities of Queensland and Sydney) and Andrew Lawrence (Florey Institute, Melbourne) were Congress President and Vice President respectively. As an International conference, the World Congress rotates between different regions of the world. Indeed, this was its first visit to Australia for nearly 20 years.

The Congress was co-sponsored by the World Health Organization, a rare honour, which reflects that ISBRA has had official relations as a non-state (professional) organisation with WHO for the past 30 years. It is frequently sought out by WHO for its expertise and support for WHO's policies and programs on a range of substance use disorders and behavioural addictions. 530 scientists and clinicians from 32 countries participated. Large overseas contingents came from the US, Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and many European countries and also colleagues from Africa and South America.

The single word most commonly used by participants to describe the Congress was “fantastic”. The program included 16 plenary and keynote talks (listed in Table 1) given by leading experts. There were 60 symposia, together with sessions for early career investigators and practical sessions oriented to clinical treatment and recovery. In addition, there were 75 free oral presentations and a similar number of poster demonstrations. Our overseas guests were headed by Dr. George Koob, the Director of the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

The conference was structured around several streams:

The first thousand days of life (including foetal alcohol spectrum disorder)

Epidemiology, public health and prevention

Neuroscience and pharmacology

Organ damage

Treatment

The addictive disorders spectrum

Opioid use disorders and their treatment

Gambling and video gaming

Of course much of the value of an international conference is in sharing findings and experiences of our research and its applicability to clinical practice. There was an audible buzz around the Melbourne Convention Centre as people were discussing projects, forming linkages and canvassing potential grant applications.

The conference also provided the opportunity for non-government organisations and those with lived experience of substance use disorders and addictions, who were encouraged to host symposia and were provided with displays for a small fee or free or charge.

Table 1: Plenary and keynote speakers in order of presentation

Speaker	Country	Topic
John Saunders (for WHO)	Australia	Strengthening global efforts to address substance use
George Koob	USA	Closing the treatment gap, and Neurobiology of addiction
Sawitri Assanangkornchai	Thailand	Global epidemiology of alcohol and opioid use
Sachio Matsushita	Japan	Gambling disorder and its treatment
Elizabeth Elliott	Australia	Tackling the legacy of alcohol and drugs in the first 1,000 days
Katie Witkiewitz	USA	Precision medicine for alcohol disorder
Ed Riley & Jennifer Thomas	USA	Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder
Henry Kranzler	USA	Treatment of alcohol use disorder
Nathaniel Day	Canada	The future of opioid agonist treatment
Sir John Strang	UK	Technologies to prevent opioid deaths
Mack Mitchell	USA	Treatment strategies for alcohol-induced liver disease
Rasmon Kalayasiri	Thailand	Effects of cannabis legalisation
Elisabet Jerlhag	Sweden	Alcohol and the gut-brain axis
Kyung-Tse Lee	South Korea	Food addiction
Marc Schuckit	USA	Alcohol problems over two generations

The next ISBRA Congress is a year early, being held on June 21-25, 2025. It will be co-hosted with the US Research Society on Alcohol (RSA) and will be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, US You are very welcome to join us.

WELCOME WOMINJEKA



World Congress
on Alcohol
and Addictions
23-26 September

2024

Melbourne, Australia









