

Summary of the 2025 APSAAR Symposia

The APSAAR symposia at the 2025 International Conference on Drug Policy in Bangkok, Thailand, brought together experts to discuss critical issues related to drug policy, addiction, and treatment. The three sessions—"The Intersection of Addiction," "Breaking New Ground," and "Optimizing Controlled Medicines Policy"—provided key insights into stimulant use, co-occurring disorders, and the delicate balance between patient access and drug control.

Session II-1: The Intersection of Addiction: ATS, Chemsex, and Gambling Disorder

This symposium explored the complex interplay between different forms of addiction, particularly stimulant use, chemsex, and gambling disorder.

- **Anne Yee** presented on a novel **online intervention** aimed at reducing HIV/STI risks and drug-related harms among stimulant-using men who have sex with men (MSM) in Malaysia. The study, conducted via the website www.chemfunsupport.online, showed potential for harm reduction but highlighted challenges with participant retention.
 - **Dohoon Kwon** and **Dai Jin Kim** from Korea shed light on the changing landscape of drug use, noting a shift towards younger populations and a diversification of substances. Their research emphasized a link between rising online gambling and stimulant use, suggesting a shared neurobiological basis involving **dopamine activation**.
 - **Marc N. Potenza** from Yale University further explored the **shared neurobiology and genetics** of stimulant use and gambling disorders. He discussed how these common factors have significant clinical and policy implications, raising a timely concern about how increased access to gambling in countries like Thailand could impact vulnerable individuals.
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Session I-2: Breaking New Ground: Exploring Novel Approaches to ATS Addiction

This session showcased innovative research and treatment strategies for ATS (Amphetamine-Type Stimulant) addiction from across the Asia-Pacific region.

- **Tomohiro Shirasaka** presented a survey on substance use disorders in Japan, highlighting the importance of using **standardized psychometric tools** to match patients with appropriate levels of care. The study found a mismatch between the severity of dependence and the care provided, indicating a need for better patient screening.
- **Kristiana Siste** discussed the effectiveness of **Indo-SURFT**, a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) intervention for incarcerated women with methamphetamine use disorder in Indonesia. The study found that Indo-SURFT helped improve employment-related outcomes and reduced cravings, though follow-up care was necessary to maintain gains.

- **Yong Chan Jeong** presented on the development of a **CBT-based digital therapeutic device** called **D-STOP** in South Korea. This tool aims to bridge the gap in limited addiction treatment facilities by providing a digital intervention to improve access and outcomes for individuals with substance use disorders.
- **Joel Galernter** shared insights from his work on the **genetics of cannabis use** and its implications for the study of stimulants. He highlighted how large biobank samples can reveal the genetic architecture of substance use traits and suggested that a similar approach could be applied to studying stimulants in Thailand, which would be invaluable for future research.

Session II-4: Optimizing Controlled Medicines Policy: Balancing Access and Safety

This symposium focused on the challenges of ensuring access to essential controlled medicines while preventing their diversion and misuse.

- **Viroj Sumyai** addressed the persistent global imbalance in the availability of essential narcotic and psychotropic medicines for medical purposes. He highlighted the concerning lack of access to opioid analgesics for pain management in many regions, including East and Southeast Asia, despite a sufficient global supply.
- **Diah Setia Utami** shared Indonesia's experience with its **Methadone Maintenance Treatment (MMT) program**, initiated to combat rising heroin use and HIV transmission. She noted that while Indonesia has developed robust regulations to prevent misuse, the program now faces new challenges with the increasing prevalence of methamphetamine use.
- **Sawitri Assanangkornchai** clarified the **INCB's dual mandate** to ensure the availability of essential medicines for medical purposes while rigorously preventing their diversion. She advocated for strengthening national regulatory frameworks, improving data collection, and enhancing professional education to achieve a balanced policy that safeguards public health and meets patient needs.