



FORUM: World Health Organisation (WHO)

TOPIC: Strengthening the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse and Addiction

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POSITION: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Eleanna, and I am honored to be your chair in the WHO committee for this conference. I am 17 years old, a student at Anavryta Model High school and I have been actively involved in MUN conferences as a delegate in various committees. These experiences have been incredibly meaningful to me, helping me grow both personally and intellectually and creating a strong interest in diplomacy, global issues, and international collaboration over the past few years.

I am excited to engage in discussions with all of you and hear your ideas, as we explore one of the most pressing issues affecting societies worldwide: how to prevent narcotic drug abuse and addiction. Model United Nations is a unique opportunity to exchange ideas, develop diplomatic skills, and collaborate in search of effective solutions. I encourage each of you to come well prepared, approach debate with an open mind, and contribute to creating a respectful and productive committee environment so everyone can enjoy their time there.

If you have any questions ahead of the conference, don't hesitate to reach out at eleannaroumpi@gmail.com. I'm excited to see your thoughts and ideas!!

Best regards,

Eleanna Roumpi

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Addiction is categorized as a psychological and/or physical dependence on drugs, or other substances, like alcohol, and sometimes even involves certain behaviours too. It is often tied to substance use disorder, which is a medical condition where an individual continues using a substance even when it affects their health negatively and disrupts everyday life. Studies have indicated that addiction can reshape brain areas connected to reward, drive, learning, and decision-making. Consequently, overcoming addiction can be challenging, and it may need long-term support, both medically and psychologically. The effects of addiction can also vary greatly from one person to another, depending on factors such as the substance involved, the length of use, and the person's circumstances.

Substance abuse is more about the harmful or risky use of psychoactive substances that can have severe consequences on a person's physical condition, emotional balance, and their relationships with other people. These substances include alcohol, opioids, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamines, hallucinogens, inhalants, sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, and other drugs that can end up causing dependence or misuse. Even so, substance abuse might grow into addiction, but not everyone who misuses something ends up becoming dependent on it. Recognizing harmful patterns early can therefore be important in preventing more serious health and social consequences later on.

Substance abuse and addiction are still big public health problems and social challenges worldwide, and they touch people from a lot of different walks of life. Their consequences don't stop at the individual, and they can feed into crime, poverty, family stress, infectious diseases, and also financial burdens on communities and governments. Tackling these challenges means having prevention that actually works, treatment that is reachable, and real cooperation between countries and international groups, because none of it tends to happen alone. Finding effective ways to address these issues is therefore important not only for individuals and families, but also for the wider communities affected by them.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Substance Abuse

"The harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs, that can lead to physical, psychological, or social problems. It often involves patterns of use that negatively affect a person's health, relationships, education, or employment." ¹

Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

"Substance Use Disorder is a medical condition characterized by the inability to control substance use despite harmful consequences. It involves changes in brain function that affect behaviour, decision-making, and impulse control." ²

Addiction

"Addiction is a chronic disorder involving compulsive substance use or behaviours despite harmful consequences. It is associated with changes in the brain's reward, motivation, and self-control systems." ³

¹World Health Organization. "Substance Abuse." World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/substance-abuse>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Drug Misuse and Addiction." National Institutes of Health, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

³ National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction." National Institutes of Health, <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

Rehabilitation

“The process of helping individuals recover from substance dependence by improving physical health, mental well-being, social functioning, and reintegration into society.”⁴

Harm Reduction

“Harm reduction refers to policies and programs aimed at reducing the negative health and social consequences of drug use without necessarily requiring immediate abstinence.”⁵

Drug Dependence

“Drug dependence is a state in which a person experiences a strong need to continue using a substance due to physical or psychological adaptation.”⁶

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Today's Drug Use Epidemic

In recent years, the emergence of synthetic drugs and the misuse of prescription medications have intensified existing challenges. Synthetic opioids, particularly highly potent substances such as fentanyl, have contributed to a significant increase in overdose deaths in several regions. At the same time, many individuals affected by substance use disorders remain without treatment due to financial barriers, stigma, discrimination, or a lack of available healthcare services. It is clear that there is a need for international cooperation.

Causes and Risk Factors

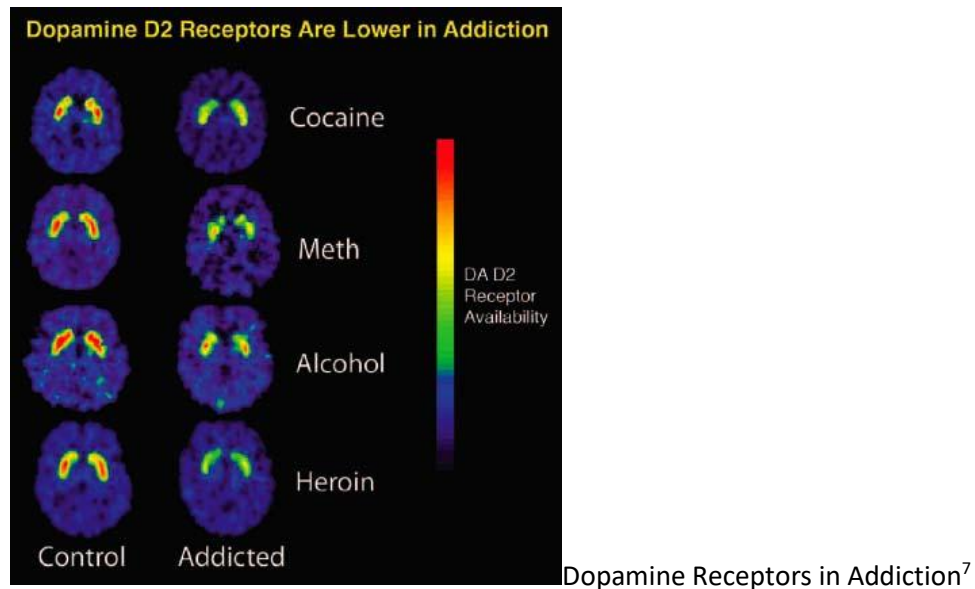
Biological Factors

Genetic factors, brain development and changes in neurological systems can influence an individual's vulnerability to addiction. Research indicates that addiction results from interactions between genetics and environmental influences. The way that a body metabolizes a substance can either act as a repellent or an encouragement to use more. For instance, when someone drinks alcohol and feels nausea, they stop. But if they feel lightheaded and euphoric, they may be encouraged to keep drinking. Important is also the receptor sensitivity of one's brain. Individuals whose brain produces less dopamine, can feel generally less motivated and even depressed, making them seek out the instant dopamine from drugs.

⁴World Health Organization. *Rehabilitation*. World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/rehabilitation>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

⁵ Harm Reduction International. “What Is Harm Reduction?” Harm Reduction International, <https://hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction/>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

⁶ World Health Organization. *Lexicon of Alcohol and Drug Terms*. World Health Organization, 1994.



Psychological Factors

Mental health conditions, trauma, stress, and emotional difficulties may increase the likelihood of substance misuse. Unresolved trauma, difficult childhood and experiences such as physical abuse and neglect are pointing towards an impending addiction because those individuals are highly likely to seek relief from the chronic physical and emotional pain with the abuse of painkillers and self-medication. For people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the constant thoughts and destructive tendencies are exhausting so the need for numbing is strong and drugs provide this metaphorical shield towards those thoughts and feelings.

Social and Economic Factors

Poverty, unemployment, inequality, limited education and social exclusion can increase vulnerability to substance misuse. The constant stress factory to person's everyday life can push them towards drug abuse as a means to relieve stress and self-medication for anxiety disorders. Substance abuse severely impacts productivity, leading to job loss and in communities where healthcare is way too expensive, drug addicts find it difficult to attend to their needs or even afford professional help to battle their addiction. As a result, the person "drowning" in addiction cannot break the cycle even when they reach the stage where they want to seek professional help and enter rehabilitation. For lower-income individuals, rehabilitation is out of limits as treatment costs are high and many do not qualify for medical insurance. The underfunded public healthcare centres cannot assess and react timely to the needs of every individual due to lack of resources and personnel. In this case, the addiction is neither prevented nor treated and it becomes more severe.

⁷ "File:Dopamine D2 Receptors in Addiction.Jpg - Wikimedia Commons." Wikimedia.Org, Oct. 2007, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dopamine_D2_Receptors_in_Addiction.jpg. Accessed 18 Oct. 2026.



Social factors also can push people to addiction. The stigma around substance abuse can isolate and marginalize an individual, discouraging them from seeking help or feeling worthy of recovery. Often addicts have a traumatic family background and they do not have the needed social circle to help them deal with their addiction or even encourage them to seek other coping mechanisms actively preventing addiction. The peer pressure and the way that drugs and alcohol are advertised, in combination with the very easy access to them, tend to be the primary reason for the initial substance use.

Availability of Substances

The increased availability of synthetic drugs, including highly potent synthetic opioids, has created new challenges for governments and healthcare systems worldwide. These substances can be produced and distributed quickly, making them difficult to control. Their high potency also increases the risk of overdose and other serious health consequences. Additionally, the emergence of new psychoactive substances makes it difficult for authorities to regulate drug markets effectively and for healthcare systems to respond to new threats.

Addiction's Consequences to the Public

Substance abuse contributes to overdose deaths, infectious diseases, mental health conditions, and increased pressure on the healthcare systems, the economy and the security of the community.

Public Health

An immediate consequence of substance abuse is the overload put to healthcare facilities as the demand for emergency medical services is overwhelming. The rise of fentanyl and other similar synthetic opioids to the market has caused an overdose epidemic which requires constant deployment of first responders, extra stock of reversal agents like NARCAN and more facilities and personnel to tend to those brought to the hospital in critical condition. This treatment is extended to the management of chronic diseases related to long-term drug abuse such as alcohol-related liver cirrhosis, cardiovascular disease from stimulant abuse and severe pulmonary issues from smoking substances.⁸

Individuals that struggle with drug abuse tend to share contaminated needles and other equipment used to take drugs leading to severe transmission of infectious diseases, specifically HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis B and C. Bacterial infections and sexually

⁸ Schulte, Marya T., and Yih-Ing Hser. "Substance Use and Associated Health Conditions Throughout the Lifespan." *Public Health Reviews*, vol. 35, no. 2, Dec. 2014, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5373082/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5373082/), 10.1007/bf03391702. Accessed 18 Oct. 2026.



transmitted infections (STIs) are very common among addicted but threaten the public health, too.

Social and Economic Consequences

People who suffer from addiction tend to struggle socially. They usually cannot hold a social circle or the people they keep company with push them towards addiction instead of encouraging healthy habits. Generally, addiction affects relationships, education, social participation and employment. The stigma and discrimination towards addicts prevents them from forming close family and social ties and from seeking treatment.

When a person is abusing substances, their priorities shift and they are no longer a productive and active member of society as they use to drop out of the workforce. They struggle with maintaining jobs even if they have decided to enter the workforce. Addiction creates great economic costs through not only the lack of productivity of addicts but also through the cost of healthcare, public rehabilitation centres as well as the expenses of law enforcement and social services that are there to respond to various episodes relevant to substance abuse. Because the managing of crises such as treating emergency episodes of overdose or chronic illnesses caused by addiction is costly, the public health budget is focused on treatment and not proactive measures such as accessible rehabilitation and mental health early intervention.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has historically been one of the world's largest producers of illicit opium, contributing to global drug trafficking challenges. The country faces difficulties related to addiction treatment, healthcare access, and economic dependence on illegal cultivation. International organizations support prevention programs, alternative development projects, and rehabilitation services, while the Taliban detain thousands of homeless-drug users from certain areas sending them after that to closed facilities, where they have to go through hard programs in order to rehab.

Canada

Canada has experienced a significant opioid and overdose crisis, especially involving fentanyl and other synthetic opioids. Its government tries to have supervised consumption services, while providing addiction treatment programs supported by public health campaigns. Approximately 21% of people in Canada (about 6 million individuals) meet the criteria for a substance use addiction at some point in their lifetime. Alcohol and cannabis remain the most widely used substances nationally, while an ongoing public health crisis persists around toxic street opioids.

Mexico

Mexico is strongly affected by illegal drug production and trafficking due to its geographic position between drug-producing regions and major consumer markets. The government focuses on combating organized crime, strengthening international cooperation, and improving prevention and treatment programs for substance use disorders. More specifically the government runs national prevention campaigns for younger ages and also focuses on the addiction as a health-mental issue rather than an action which is strictly connected with forms of punishment.

United States of America (USA)

The United States approaches the substance abuse and opioid epidemic through a combination of public health initiatives, law enforcement and harm reduction strategies. Over the past decade, federal policy has increasingly shifted from a strictly punitive model to treating addiction as a chronic medical condition requiring prevention, treatment, and recovery support.⁹ In January 2026, the White House issued an executive order establishing the Great American Recovery Initiative. This initiative coordinates federal efforts to address substance abuse as a national crisis. The program focuses on directing federal budgets to support addiction recovery, increasing access to behavioural health services and advising agency leaders on best practices for treatment.¹⁰ Historically, the US has called “war” on drugs and depended mainly on law enforcement to handle the opioid crisis. Nowadays, current policies focus on reformation of the criminal justice system, such as expanding specialized drug courts that divert non-violent offenders into mandatory community health treatment programs rather than prison. The Affordable Care Act also played a major role in this shift by requiring insurance companies to cover addiction treatment.¹¹

European Union

The European Union faces challenges related to synthetic drugs, cocaine trafficking, opioid misuse, and unequal access to addiction treatment across member states. Through cooperation between countries and organizations such as the European Union Drugs Agency, the EU focuses on monitoring drug trends, improving prevention programs, and expanding healthcare responses.

International Narcotics Control Board (INCB)

The INCB monitors the implementation of international drug control treaties and works to ensure that controlled substances are available for legitimate medical purposes while preventing misuse and illegal trafficking.

⁹ National Drug Control Strategy, [bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf](https://www.bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf). Accessed 20 Oct. 2026.

¹⁰ kpage_drupal_sso. “Administration Issues Executive Order on Combating Substance Use | AHA News.” American Hospital Association | AHA News, 2026, <https://www.aha.org/news/headline/2026-01-30-administration-issues-executive-order-combating-substance-use>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2026.

¹¹ “A Drug Policy for the 21st Century.” The White House, 2020, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/node/287066>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2026.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

The UNODC is the main United Nations organization responsible for addressing drug-related issues. It supports countries by developing prevention strategies, improving treatment systems, publishing global drug reports, and promoting international cooperation against drug trafficking.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO focuses on the health aspects of substance abuse and addiction. It provides international guidelines for prevention and treatment, supports mental health services, promotes evidence-based healthcare approaches, and works to reduce stigma surrounding addiction.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

DATE	EVENT
1961	The Convention established an international framework to regulate narcotic substances while ensuring access to controlled medicines for medical purposes.
1988	UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic that strengthened international cooperation against trafficking.
1997	Creation of UNODC, a main UN body dealing with drugs and crime.
2016	UNGASS contributes to facing the World Drug Problem, making a shift toward healthcare, rehabilitation, and human rights.
2020-2025	Increase of synthetic drugs and treatment inequalities which is the current issue

RELEVANT UN TREATIES, CONVENTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961)¹²

Adopted: 30 March 1961

Entered into force: 13 December 1964

It created the foundation of the modern international drug control system. It aimed to ensure that narcotic substances were available for medical and scientific purposes while preventing illegal production, trafficking, and misuse. However, it is primarily focused on controlling the supply rather than expanding treatment and prevention services.

Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971)¹³

Adopted: 21 February 1971

Entered into force: 16 August 1976

This convention expanded international drug control to include psychotropic substances such as stimulants, sedatives, and hallucinogens that could cause dependence or misuse. It established an international control system for these substances by placing them into different schedules according to their medical value and potential for abuse. At the same time, it recognized that psychotropic substances should remain available for legitimate medical and scientific purposes. The convention therefore sought to balance access to necessary medicines with measures to prevent their illicit production, trafficking, and misuse.

United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988)¹⁴

Adopted: 20 December 1988

Entered into force: 11 November 1990

This convention strengthened international cooperation against illegal drug trafficking and organized criminal networks involved in drug production and distribution, while focusing mainly on criminal justice rather than healthcare and rehabilitation. The convention offers further legal means of upholding the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. On November 11, 1990, the Convention came into effect. The convention has 191 Parties as of June 2020.

¹² United Nations. *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961*. United Nations Treaty Collection, <https://treaties.un.org>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

¹³ United Nations. *Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971*. United Nations Treaty Collection, <https://treaties.un.org>. Accessed 31 July 2026.

¹⁴ United Nations. *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988*. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/>. Accessed 31 July 2026.



UNGASS 2016 Outcome Document: “Our Joint Commitment to Effectively Addressing and Countering the World Drug Problem” ¹⁵

Adopted: 19 April 2016

The 2016 UN General Assembly Special Session marked a major shift toward a public health-centered approach to drug policy. It has great importance because it recognized addiction as a health issue, promoted evidence-based treatment, and encouraged reducing stigma against people with substance use disorders, while treating drug dependence largely as a health issue rather than solely a criminal justice matter.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

Portugal's Public Health Model (2001)

In 2001, Portugal decriminalized the possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use and redirected resources toward prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation. Instead of criminal prosecution, individuals are referred to health professionals who assess their needs and provide appropriate support. The policy has been associated with lower rates of overdose deaths, HIV transmission, and problematic drug use, making it one of the most frequently cited examples of a health-centered approach to addiction.

UNODC and WHO Prevention and Treatment Initiatives

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have worked together to promote evidence-based prevention and treatment strategies worldwide. Their initiatives include the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention and the International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, which encourage Member States to implement school-based prevention programs, expand access to treatment, and strengthen healthcare systems. Although these initiatives have improved international guidance, implementation remains uneven due to differences in national resources and healthcare capacity.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Strengthening Prevention Through Education

Member States should invest in evidence-based prevention programs in schools, local communities, and healthcare settings. These initiatives should provide reliable information about the risks of substance use while helping young people develop decision-making, stress-management, and coping skills. Prevention efforts should also tackle underlying risk factors, including trauma, poverty, and social inequality, which often contribute to substance abuse.

¹⁵ United Nations General Assembly. *Resolution S-30/1: Our Joint Commitment to Effectively Addressing and Countering the World Drug Problem*. United Nations, 2016.

Expanding Access to Treatment and Rehabilitation

Governments should ensure that affordable addiction treatment is available through national healthcare systems. Since substance use disorder is a chronic medical condition rather than solely a criminal justice issue, treatment should include long-term medical, psychological, and social support. Expanding access to rehabilitation services can improve recovery outcomes, reduce overdose deaths, and ease the burden on healthcare systems and communities.

Enhancing International Cooperation and Harm Reduction

Member States should strengthen cooperation through information sharing, joint law-enforcement efforts, and coordinated public health policies to respond to emerging drug threats such as synthetic opioids and transnational trafficking networks. At the same time, evidence-based harm reduction measures—including overdose prevention initiatives and access to appropriate healthcare services—can significantly reduce preventable deaths while protecting public health.

Strengthening Community-Based Support Systems

Governments can fund local health centers, youth organizations, social workers, and community programs that provide early intervention, counseling, family support, and assistance with reintegration into education or employment. These services can offer a lot to communities where specialized addiction-treatment facilities are limited. Community-based programs can also help identify substance-use problems earlier and connect individuals with appropriate professional treatment before their condition becomes more severe. This approach addresses not only addiction itself, but also the social and economic difficulties that can make recovery harder.

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