

Takeaways from the 2024 Asia-Pacific Chemsex Symposium



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Asia-Pacific Chemsex Symposium

- First held in 2019, Taiwan – response to rising chemsex prevalence
- Critical platform connecting community, HCPs, NGOs/CSOs, researchers, policymakers & donors across Asia-Pacific
- Culturally sensitive, safe, multi-disciplinary space for dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration

- **APCS 2024**

- 6th meeting, held on November 6-7, 2024, in Bangkok, Thailand (first time outside Taiwan)
- Theme: “**Pleasures, Policies, Possibilities**”
- 300+ participants from 27 countries

“Pleasures, Policies, Possibilities”

Pleasures

Shift from risk-based to pleasure-based; a more balanced, humane lens — understanding why people engage in chemsex

Policies

Address legal, structural & stigma barriers; engage policymakers, legal experts & law enforcement

Possibilities

Beyond abstinence — explore new harm reduction & service models

Pleasures



*Pleasures
Policies
Possibilities*

The Rush to Risk

“While public health has made important contributions to establishing the link between methamphetamine use and sexual risk-taking, the precise nature of the relationship is not well defined. **This creates space for ungrounded assumptions about methamphetamine use to take hold.**”

Two common themes in the methamphetamine/sexual practice relationship in the literatures

1. Methamphetamine → sexual disinhibition, risky behavior, poor health outcomes
2. Methamphetamine often attracts men who are inclined towards these risks (likely to engage with or without drugs anyway)



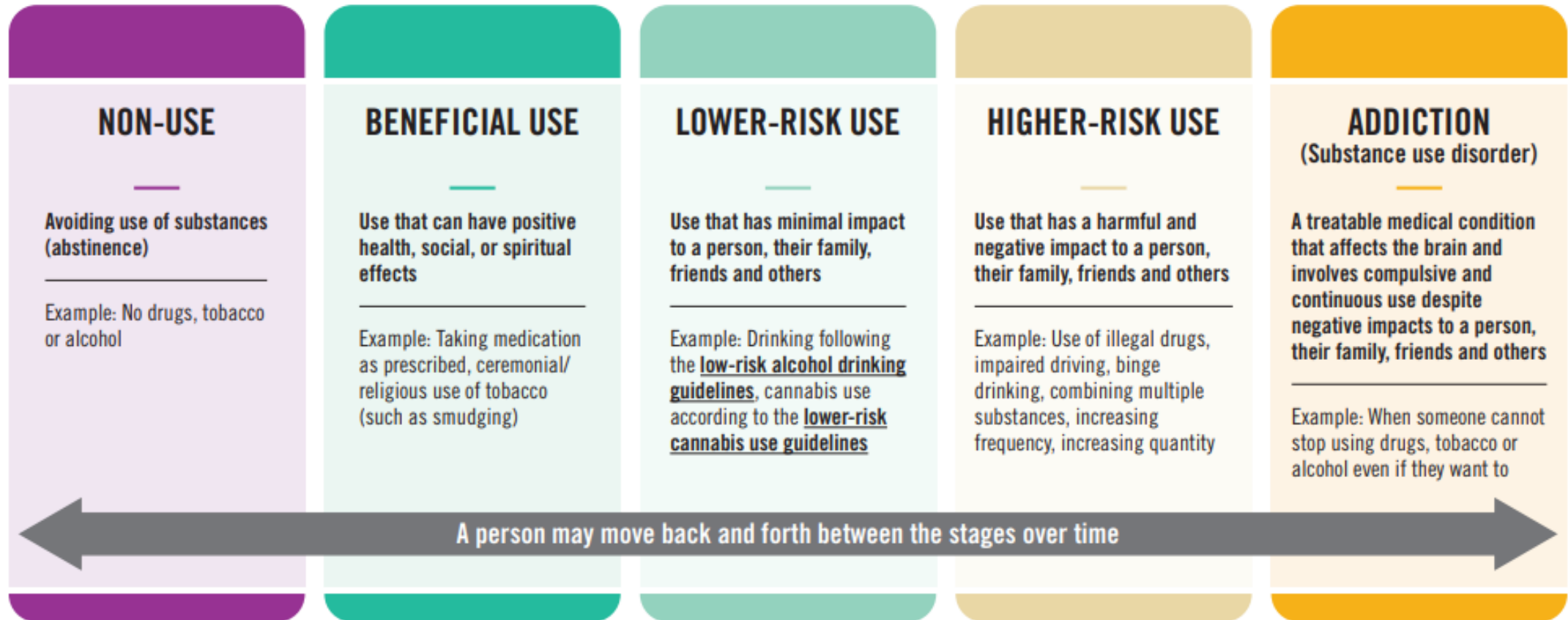
The rush to risk when interrogating the relationship between methamphetamine use and sexual practice among gay and bisexual men

Joanne Bryant^{a,*}, Max Hopwood^a, Gary W. Dowsett^{a,b}, Peter Aggleton^a, Martin Holt^a, Toby Lea^a, Kerryn Drysdale^a, Carla Treloar^a

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^b Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 215 Franklin Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000, Australia

Not all drug use is ‘problematic’



Government of Canada (2022). Substance use spectrum.
Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/substance-use-spectrum-infographic.html>

Motivations for Chemsex

Enhanced and
extended sexual
gratification and
pleasure

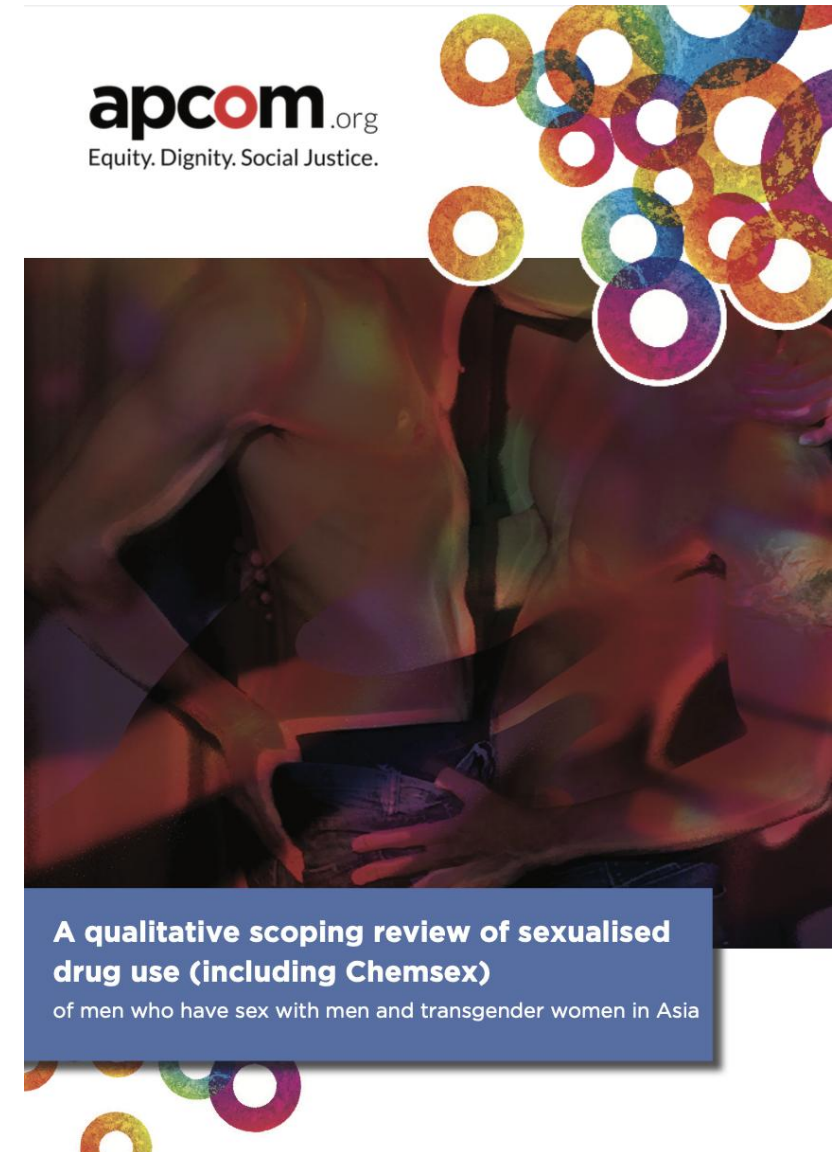
Freedom and
confidence to
explore sexual
fantasies

Pride and
empowerment

Beauty and
social power

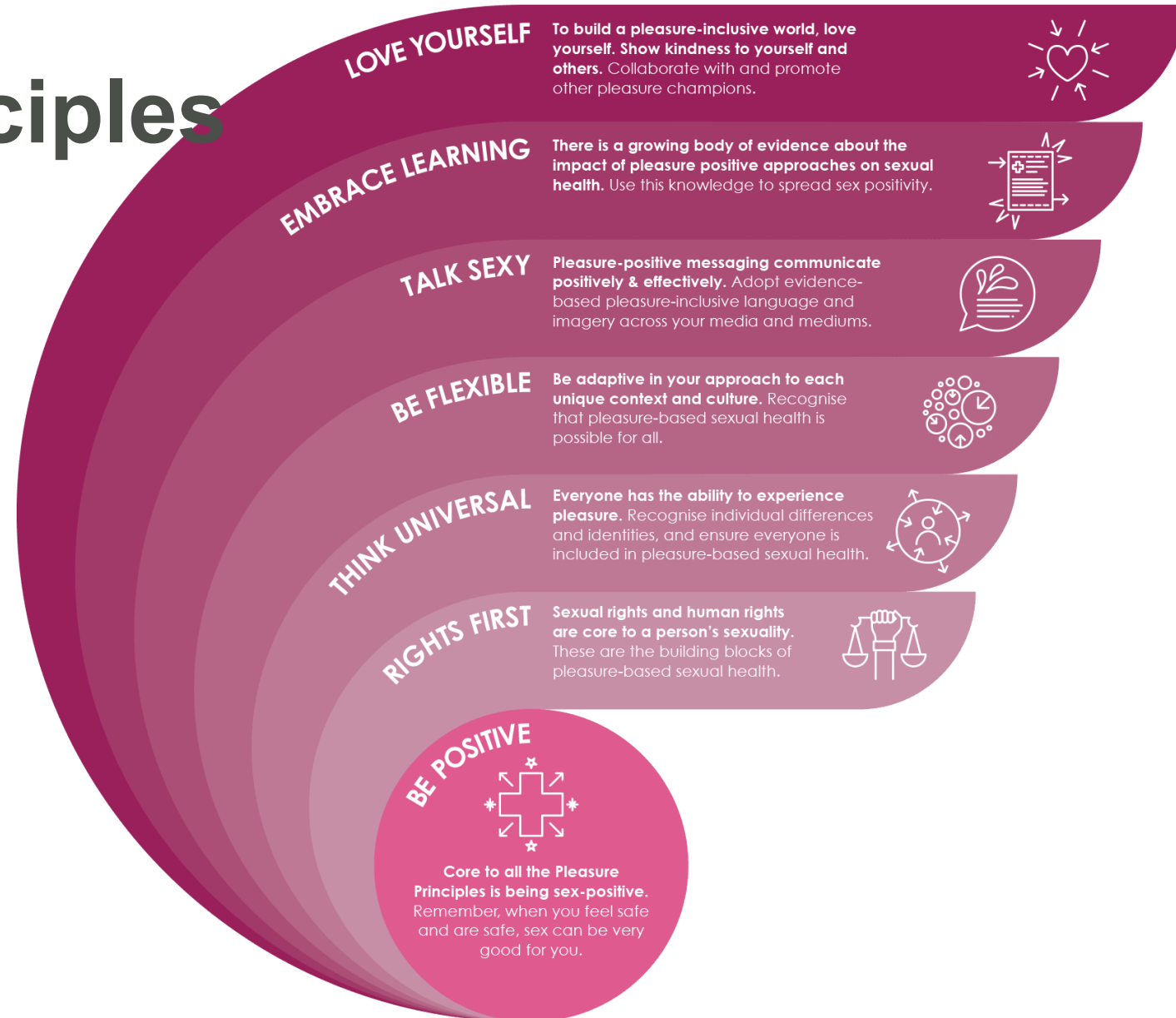
Social and sexual
lubricant

Community identity
and culture



The Pleasure Principles

A guide and inspiration to support people and organizations to embark on the journey towards a **sex-positive, pleasure-based** approach to sexual health.



Policies



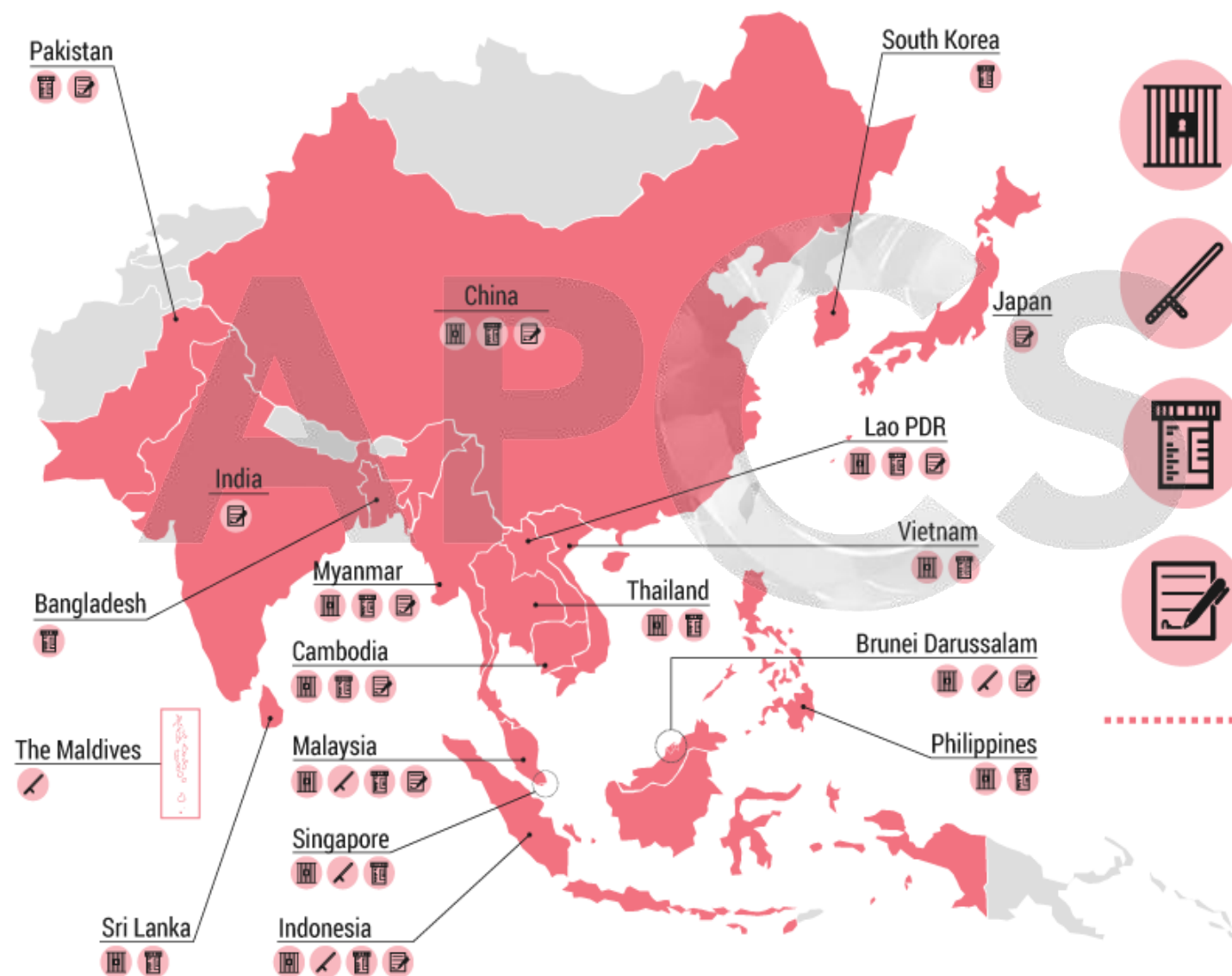
*Pleasures
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Diverse Policy & Legal Contexts

HK	ID	JP	KR	MM	MY	PH	PK	SG	TH	TW	VN
Do HCPs have a legal obligation to report their patients' use of illicit substance to the police?											
X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓ (Doctor)	X	X	X
Are there any "medicalization" or "decriminalization" policies available for people having chemsex and arrested by the police? (i.e. interventions other than sending the substance users to jail)											
✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X
Does the central government invest in harm reduction policies?											
✓	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓
Does the local or regional government invest in harm reduction policies?											
N/A	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓

HK, Hong Kong; ID, Indonesia (Bali); JP, Japan; KR, South Korea; MM, Myanmar; MY, Malaysia; PH, Philippines; SG, Singapore; TH, Thailand; TW, Taiwan; VN, Vietnam

Source: Stephane Wen-Wei Ku, MD. Keynote Speech, "Chemsex in Asia-Pacific"
6th Asia Pacific Chemsex Symposium (APCS 2024), Bangkok, Thailand.



Compulsory *rehabilitation* in detention

Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam



Corporal punishment

Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Maldives and Singapore



Forced urine testing

Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam



Mandatory registration

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, and Pakistan

Administrative punishment

can also amount to acts of torture or cruel treatment

Source: Gloria Lei. Keynote Speech, "Drug policy trend in Asia-Pacific"
6th Asia Pacific Chemsex Symposium (APCS 2024), Bangkok, Thailand.

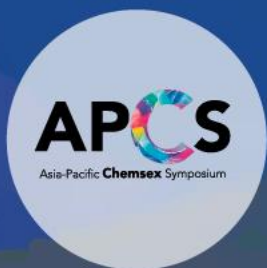
UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health 2024: *Drug use, harm reduction and the right to health*



- Right to give informed consent to treatment
- Right to information
- Right to privacy, e.g. confidentiality of personal health data
- Right to bodily integrity, e.g. mandatory testing of drug use may be a violation
- State obligation to implement evidence-based interventions to minimize the adverse health and risks and harms associated with drug use

Recommendation: **Decriminalize** the use, possession, purchase and cultivation of drugs for personal use and move toward alternative regulatory approaches that put the protection of people's health and other human rights front and centre.

“Decriminalization of substance use and possession for use needs tangible and concerted actions – communities, researchers, providers, legal experts, policy makers.”



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Possibilities



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Chemsex Toolkit

For clinical service providers
in the Asia-Pacific region

Aims

To provide clinical service providers with an **understanding and awareness of chemsex**, to enable **effective communication in a non-judgmental manner** with clients who may be at risk of HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs and other harms from their use of drugs. In doing so, clinical service providers can assist clients by providing support, education, referrals and offer HIV, viral hepatitis and STI prevention and treatment services and other harm reduction strategies to improve clients' sexual, physical, psychological health and social co-morbidities.

Chemsex Toolkit

For clinical service providers
in the Asia-Pacific region

1. Understanding Chemsex

- What is Chemsex
- Chemsex Drugs
- Motivations for Chemsex
- Chemsex Related Harms

2. Chemsex Harm Reduction

- Approach to Harm Reduction
- Sexual Health Services
- Prevention of HIV and STIs
- Service Delivery Approaches
- Linkages and Referrals
- Structural Barriers in Healthcare Settings

3. Guides and Tools

4. Case Studies

5. Chemsex Training Modules

- Developed specifically for community outreach workers
- A collaborative effort between the Viet Nam Administration of HIV/AIDS Control (VAAC), Ho Chi Minh City University, communities, UNAIDS and UNODC
- Focused on
 - HIV & STIs prevention
 - Mental health
 - Drug use/addiction



Chemsex Interventions for HIV Prevention in Viet Nam

Nguyen Thi Minh Tam, MD; Do Van Dung, MD; and Nguyen Thi Bich Hue. Keynote Speech: "Training Toolkit for Community Outreach Workers in Vietnam"
6th Asia Pacific Chemsex Symposium (APCS 2024), Bangkok, Thailand.

1. Overview of Chemsex
2. Commonly used substances in Chemsex
3. Chemsex and its relationship to HIV, STIs
4. Mental health and acute poisoning in Chemsex
5. Basic principles and skills when working with chemsex participants
6. Some psychosocial interventions for chemsex participants
7. Substance use screening using the ASSIST tool and brief interventions
8. Developing an intervention plan for clients who participate in chemsex
9. Harm reduction interventions related to chemsex



Chemsex Interventions for HIV Prevention in Viet Nam

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CHEMSEX USERS' SUPPORT NEEDS

Physical health

- HIV, STIs
- Hepatitis
- Asthenia
- Dental issues
- Cardiovascular
- Digestive issues ...

Mental health

- Anxiety disorders
- Depression
- Psychosis
- Hallucinations, delusions
- Self-stigma

Social support

- Self-isolation with family, friend
- Disconnection to social relationship
- Lack of social interactions
- Policy and legal support

RECOVERY BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT (incl. CUT DOWN & CESSATION)

- Supports for reducing dose and frequency (CBT, MI,...)
- Cut down, cessation of drugs and prevent reuse

Thanh Phung

Lighthouse Social Enterprise



Chemsex Intervention Package

The following interventions are for outreach workers (ORWs) who offer advice to people who participate in chemsex. They are based on the harm reduction approach: they aim to promote the health and well-being of people who participate in chemsex. They focus on positive change and on working with people without judgement or requiring that they stop (or reduce) their drug use. These interventions do not seek to encourage risk behaviour, their intention is to provide clients with a knowledge base and to empower them with skills to promote their well-being.

Interventions are structured into categories of interventions that should be offered before a person attends a session, during the session, and after the person has left the session. These categories are split into subsections which describe, (in emboldened brackets), whether they are aimed at promoting the person's physical, mental, or sexual health.

ORWs can adapt the implementation of these interventions based on their characteristics/ personality, and the context, personality, and personal situation of their clients.



**CHEMSEX
INTERVENTION
PACKAGE**



Nguyen Minh Trang
Centre for Supporting
Community Development
Initiatives, Vietnam

Chemsex Harm Reduction Interventions



Help clients to improve



Physical health



Mental health



Sexual health



Akarin Hiransuthikul
CLYMAX, Thailand



Service design recommendations

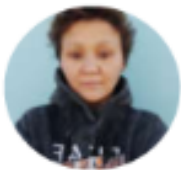
1 The basic principles on which the design of HIV services for people who use synthetic new psychoactive substances should be based are:

-  anonymity and confidentiality
-  gender equality
-  absence of stigma and discrimination
-  a peer-to-peer approach



2 Need for training of peer consultants and social workers on the following:

-  Mental health support
-  Overdose prevention and care
-  HIV testing, PrEP
-  Legal literacy
-  Digital safety
-  Expansion of harm reduction package



Nazik Abylgazieva
Attika, Kyrgyzstan

“ Chemsex service needs to be community-led, comprehensive (don’t forget legal/rights harm reduction), people-centered, and pleasure-based. ”

And we need to make it sustainable.



*Pleasures
Policies
Possibilities*



<https://www.apcsymposium.org/apcs2024-resources>

APCS2024 Resources

Day 1 | 6 November 2024

Keynote speech 1: *Chemsex in Asia-Pacific*

- [Stephane Wen-Wei Ku](#), Taipei City Hospital Renai Branch, Taiwan

[Keynote 1 | Slides](#)

Keynote speech 2: *Drug policy trend in Asia-Pacific*

- [Gloria Lai](#), International Drug Policy Consortium

[Keynote 2 | Slides](#)

Keynote speech 3: *The ever changing legal status of cannabis in Thailand*

- [Chopaka Kitty Chokwan](#), Independent Cannabis Advocate and Activist, Thailand

[Keynote 3 | Slides](#)



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CHEM-USE
SYMPOSIUM
CHEMS CHOICES COMMUNITY

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Pleasures, Policies, Possibilities

APCS Asia-Pacific
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