



World Health  
Organization

# International cooperation to address global public health harms caused by NPS while protecting access to medicines

Dilkushi Poovendran  
Technical Officer

WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence  
Department of Health Product Policy and Standards



# Declarations of interest

---

- None



# What does WHO do?



- Specialized health agency of the UN
- WHO works worldwide to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable.
- Our goal is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and well-being.
- Working with 194 Member States, across six regions, and from more than 150 offices, WHO staff are united in a shared commitment to achieve better health for everyone, everywhere.

# WHO role within the International Drug Control Conventions

1961 Single Convention on  
Narcotic Drugs  
\*as amended by the 1972  
protocol

1971 Convention on  
Psychotropic Substances

- **Obliges** countries that are party to the Conventions to protect public health and welfare
- **Apply** measures of international control to substances listed in their schedules
- **Mandate** WHO with the responsibility of reviewing and assessing substances to recommend whether they should be controlled internationally
  - Assess risks of abuse, dependence and harm to health
  - Where it is relevant, the ECDD also consider whether the substance has medical or scientific use.
  - WHO Mandate reinforced by UNGASS & CND Resolutions e.g. 61/8



# International drug control process

ECDD substance prioritisation process - Evidence of use and harm



Scientific review by WHO ECDD



United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs

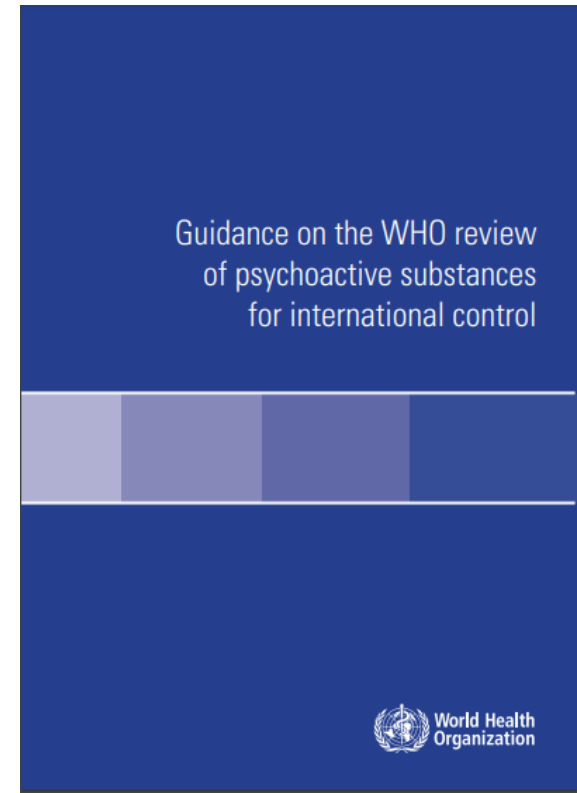


Mandatory national controls, reporting, and monitoring  
(overseen by International Narcotics Control Board)



# WHO Procedures for Substance review: Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD)

- WHO Regulations on Expert Advisory Panels and Committees
- 'Guidance on WHO review of psychoactive substances for international control'
- Established to operationalize WHO's mandate within Conventions
- Describes the processes and procedures undertaken by WHO to fulfil its treaty responsibility
  - WHA 33.27 (1980);
  - Revisions approved by WHO Exec. Board 2010
  - Describes phases of review (e.g. pre-review, critical review) and how they are initiated



# The Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD): Composition of experts

- Selected experts - recognised expertise on substance evaluation (e.g. toxicology, pharmacology, psychiatry etc.)
  - Independent medical or scientific expertise
    - Not representing a country or a governmental agency
    - Clear of conflicts of interests
- Geographic and gender balance
- Observers: UN agencies e.g. INCB, UNODC



# WHO process of substance review based on scientific evidence

## Critical/pre reviews of psychoactive substances

- Using peer-reviewed published and unpublished data
- Member State Questionnaire

## Other sources of data

- Early warning systems (UNODC & INCB)
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)
- Uppsala Monitoring Centre on adverse medicines reactions (WHO)

## Consultation process

- Info session includes reports and statements from Member States, Private Sector, Civil Society, etc.
- A special website established to publish reviews for 45th ECDD and collect public comments



## International conventions require ECDD to recommend control for:

- Individual substances only (unlike some national controls)
- Evidence of similarity to currently controlled substances in its abuse and dependence and harm to health

## Recommendations for:

- Scheduling in Conventions (if critical review)
- Further evaluation / critical review (if pre-review)
- No action
- Surveillance





# Critical review: Assessment and potential scheduling outcomes

- Substances are assessed based on scheduling criteria relating to substance abuse and dependence potential, public health harms, and therapeutic use where applicable
- Recommendation may be made:
  - Scheduling under 1961 Convention on Narcotic Drugs (Schedules I – IV)
  - Scheduling under 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances (Schedules I-IV)
  - Surveillance



# Pre-review: Assessment and potential outcomes

- The purpose of a pre-review is to determine whether a substance should be subject to a critical review
- A pre-review is a preliminary analysis and findings at this stage should not determine whether the control status of a substance should be changed
- Potential Outcomes:
  - Proceed to critical review- if information may justify scheduling in the Conventions
  - Critical review not warranted- no further evaluation
  - Surveillance



# Member State Questionnaire: Assessment and potential outcomes

- The member state questionnaire is sent to all countries (n=194) requesting data on the substances under review.
- The purpose of the member state questionnaire is to collect additional evidence about the substances reviewed, which is often lacking in the scientific literature.
- Data is requested on approved uses, non-medical use, intoxications linked to drug, route of administration, formulations of drug, seizures, control measures and capacity to detect substance.



# ECDD recommendations

- Committee meets in closed sessions to review substances and formulate recommendations regarding their international control
- Recommendations are presented to WHO's DG for endorsement.
- The WHO DG communicates the recommendations to the Secretary General of the United Nations
- These recommendations will then be disseminated to Member States for review and comments.
- The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) comprised of 53 Member States who may decide to vote on whether to accept the recommendations
- Once CND votes to accept recommendations, substances are effectively placed under international control
- Countries are obliged to enforce national control measures to monitor the manufacture, distribution, trade, etc of NPS under international control and report them to INCB



# NPS assessed by ECDD



More than 75 NPS have been assessed by the ECDD between 2014-2020. These NPS are clandestinely manufactured, have no recognized therapeutic use, and have been considered by WHO to cause significant harms to public health, warranting their control under international drug control conventions



Nearly all NPS recommendations made by the WHO ECDD have been accepted by CND, thereby placing these substances under international control. This improves monitoring of substances across international borders, and allows for better public health responses at country-level



45<sup>th</sup> ECDD convened in October in Geneva, and reviewed 9 NPS (cathinones, cannabinoids, opioids, etc) that have been reported to WHO due to reported harms to health including fatalities, hospital admissions, overdose, DUID cases, and detections in falsified medicines.



Recommendations will be presented to the CND in December for consideration of a vote in 2023



# Additional Resources

- Technical documents (pre/critical review reports) and meeting outcomes published in a WHO Technical Report Series (TRS)

