



PANEL DISCUSSION

EQUAL ACCESS & EMPOWERED HEALTH

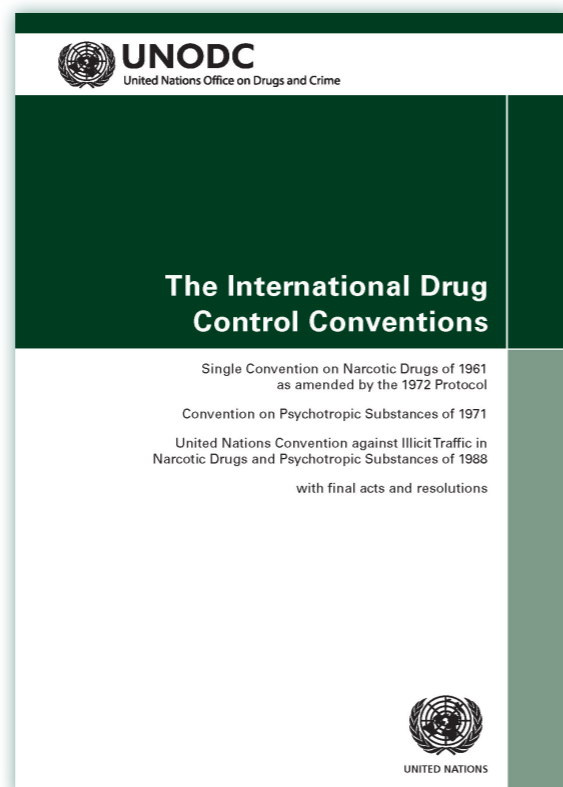
“Enhancing Access and Availability of
Controlled Substances for Medical
and Scientific Purposes”



INTRODUCTION

The three international drug control conventions collectively enshrine the commitment by the international community to make adequate provision to ensure, and not to unduly restrict, the availability of controlled substances considered indispensable for medical and scientific purposes. Notwithstanding the universally recognized medical indispensability of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, millions of people in particular in low- and middle-income countries continue to suffer due to lack of access to controlled medicines, including those on the WHO List of Essential Medicines. The reasons for inequities in access to and availability of controlled substances are extraordinarily complex and include historical vestiges across multiple systems, i.e., government, health care and society, as well as modern-day challenges, including the concerns arising out of overconsumption. There are several challenges and barriers to access to controlled medicines for pain management and other

healthcare needs, all of which are complex, multitiered and interrelated. These include, but are not limited to, trade systems, justice, foreign affairs, workforce, and development, but perhaps the most recognized and salient among them are legislation and regulatory systems, education, national supply management systems and health systems.¹



“Overall, availability for consumption of controlled medicines remains inadequate in most countries in Africa, in Asia, in Central and South America, in the Caribbean, and in Eastern Europe. In practice, this means that the majority of the world’s population does not enjoy adequate availability”.

Ghada Waly
UNODC Executive Director



According to the World Drug Report 2023², disparities in access to and availability of medicines controlled under the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961 have remained. In 2021, 86 per cent of the global population lived in countries where availability of pharmaceutical opioids for medical use was below the global average. Palliative care is another key area related to both availability of and access to controlled substances under international control. Strong opioids, such as morphine, are essential for the treatment of pain due to cancer, HIV/AIDS, and other serious illnesses, or due to traumatic injuries, burns and surgery, both in adults and children.

The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) estimated that in 2020, “78 per cent of the morphine produced globally was converted into other drugs, mainly codeine, which in turn was mainly used in cough medicines, while only 11 per cent was consumed directly, mainly for palliative care. Furthermore, over 82 per cent of the global population had access to less than 17 per cent of the world’s morphine-based medicines”³ According to the INCB, one problem is that the large majority of the morphine available is being used for the production of codeine to be used mainly for preparations in Schedule III of the 1961 Convention as amended, and only a small amount is used directly for medical purposes, such as palliative care. The limited amount used directly for pain relief is mostly used in high-income countries.⁴



“Around the world, millions of people rely on medicines based on controlled substances. They rely on them either to manage life, or to manage the end of life... And yet millions of other people suffer needlessly, because for them, these essential medicines are out of reach”.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
WHO Director-General



The European Union works to ensure consistent standards for the availability and appropriate use of controlled substances, with a view to streamlining processes and promoting access while maintaining stringent controls to prevent misuse and diversion. The “EU Global Health Strategy - Better Health for All in a Changing World”¹⁰, emphasizes the importance of equitable access to healthcare, including access to quality-assured essential medicines and treatments, acknowledging the need to address health inequalities and promote universal health coverage. Universal health coverage, addressing health inequalities, collaboration and partnerships as well as research and innovation are at the core of addressing the global health challenges associated with access to controlled substances for medical purposes, at the regional and the global level.

The European Union has a wealth of pharmaceutical good practices, from manufacturing, supply and distribution systems to pharmacovigilance and safety monitoring. While several identified barriers to

access and availability might not be considered a pressing issue in many countries of the European Union, joint efforts, based on the principle of common and shared responsibility, are crucial to address this global public health concern. Through scaling up the support to and through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the European Union and its Member States can, a) address global disparities and promote evidence-based approaches to access, while balancing the need for effective drug control measures, thereby fostering better pain management and improving quality of life including in the terminal phases; b) strengthen multilateral frameworks, promote shared and mutual learning, and encourage international cooperation, which can have positive ripple effects in tackling the unmet needs in pain management, as well as in other global health and drug-related issues; and c) demonstrate leadership in addressing global challenges including those more neglected in global health, and reflect the principles and (human rights) values that underpin the European Union.

In the centre of efforts to enhance access and availability at the global level is the work of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. As the United Nations (UN) policymaking body with prime responsibility for drug-related matters, and governing body of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, it is one of the CND’s priorities to scale up the implementation of the international drug policy commitments on improving availability of and access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes. These commitments are prominent in all the main policy documents adopted by the Commission, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in the past decades.

In 2022, which marked the 65th session of the CND and the 45th anniversary of the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines, the Belgian Chair of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, H.E. Ambassador Ghislain D’Hoop, coordinated a series of events and discussions and launched an information media campaign to raise awareness for the policy commitments on improving availability of and access to



controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes.

The initiative included a Joint Call to Action by the Heads of UNODC, WHO and INCB, and continued with awareness-raising events held in Geneva and New York. On 10 October the year-long initiative culminated in a One-Day Special Forum at the United Nations Office in Vienna, dedicated to bringing together experts from Member States, UN entities, civil society, and other international partners to discuss the subject of availability and access. An E-learning tool¹¹, prepared by the Secretariat to the CND, showcasing the contributions of key international stakeholders in the area of “availability and access” was launched at the reconvened 66th session in December 2022.



Since 2013, the UNODC has been working with the WHO and the Union for International Cancer Control to facilitate access to controlled medicines through the Joint Global Programme on “Access to Controlled Drugs for Medical Purposes While Preventing Diversion and Abuse” (also known as GLOK67). Under the joint programme, the UNODC is working with Member States to increase the availability of pain relief and palliative care services in a sustainable manner, to identify gaps and barriers to access, integrate palliative care in the health system, and create national strategic approaches.

Despite growing global advocacy, progress has not been fast enough, and significant challenges and barriers remain in improving the accessibility and availability of controlled medicines.

Urgent action, collaboration, and reforms on a global scale are needed, to ensure that no one is left to suffer needlessly without access to the essential controlled substances they require.

The 2024 mid-term review of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs will provide one such crucial opportunity for the for the international community to:

- /01 Advocate for policies that prioritize and facilitate access to controlled substances for medical and scientific purposes while preventing their diversion
- /02 Promote sharing of good practices
- /03 Call for the provision of sustainable funding for capacity-building initiatives, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, to enhance their ability to manage controlled substances
- /04 Promote the collection and analysis of reliable data on access to controlled substances to quantify the actual needs, and to monitor the availability and distribution of these substances, identify gaps or barriers, and assess the impact of policies and interventions on access and patient outcome
- /05 Raise awareness and promote understanding among policymakers and the public, and encourage evidence-based approaches to pain management and palliative care
- /06 Facilitate dialogue and partnerships among Member States, civil society organizations, healthcare professionals, and other stakeholders, with a view to encouraging knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the sharing of good practices
- /07 Advocate for adequate training of healthcare staff including in pain management and palliative care

PANEL DISCUSSION - Advancing Access: Sharing Best Practices and Scaling Up Support



With a view to promoting dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among key stakeholders in the European Union, Belgium as incoming Presidency is organising in cooperation with the UNODC a panel discussion on advancing access, sharing best practices and scaling up support on a global level.

The event aims to showcase good practices, discuss lessons learned, and accelerate the implementation of support programs through better collaboration and political and financial support at the EU-level. The event will also be crucial in light of the preparations for the upcoming 2024 mid-term review of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs which will serve to assess progress made in the implementation of all international drug policy commitments as set forth in the 2019 Ministerial Declaration.

PANEL 1 - Sharing Best Practices

Panel 1 will focus on the sharing of best practices. This panel discussion aims to explore successful strategies and collaborative efforts that have expanded access to controlled substances for medical purposes, thereby ensuring better health outcomes for larger populations. Throughout the session, experts will be invited to share evidence-based experiences, innovative models, and best practices from different regions or countries that have significantly improved access. The panel aims to focus on how the integration of controlled substance access into broader healthcare systems and patient engagement in decision-making processes have positively influenced patient care and support. Additionally, the panel will highlight the key role regulatory authorities play in shaping policies and practices and how effective engagement with them has addressed regulatory complexities.

1 Strategies or approaches

In terms of scalability and sustainability, what strategies or approaches have proven successful in expanding access initiatives to reach a larger population? Have there been any challenges encountered in scaling up, and how were they overcome?

2 Collaborative efforts

Can you highlight any collaborative efforts between governments, healthcare providers, and civil society organizations that have significantly contributed to improving access to controlled substances? What were the key factors that enabled successful collaboration?

3 Innovative models or best practices

Are there any innovative models or best practices from different regions or countries that have resulted in notable improvements in access to controlled substances? How have these models been adapted to local contexts or replicated elsewhere? What role does or could the European Union and its Member States play in this regard?

4 Evidence-based practices

Can you highlight any collaborative efforts between governments, healthcare providers, and civil society organizations that have significantly contributed to improving access to controlled substances? What were the key factors that enabled successful collaboration?

5 Patient empowerment

Have there been any successful initiatives that have actively involved and empowered patients in decision-making processes related to access to controlled substances? What role does patient engagement play in shaping policies and practices?

6 Regulatory authorities engagement

How have these successful initiatives effectively engaged with regulatory authorities, both domestically and internationally, to address challenges related to legal frameworks, licensing, and monitoring? Are there any key lessons that can be shared regarding navigating regulatory complexities?

PANEL 1 - Sharing Best Practices

7 Training programs

What are some successful examples of training programs that have been employed in different regions or countries, and how have they contributed to improving prescription practices, patient safety, and the prevention of diversion? How can successful training and education programmes be adapted for the needs of other countries to enhance knowledge, skills, and awareness regarding responsible access to controlled substances for medical purposes?

9 Cooperation with INCB

How can the cooperation with the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) be improved to effectively address regulatory challenges and promote responsible access to controlled substances for medical purposes? What mechanisms or frameworks successfully facilitate effective information sharing between member states and the INCB, and how do these ensure adherence to international drug control conventions while advancing initiatives to improve access?

11 Sustainable funding

How can sustainable funding be achieved in the national health systems to ensure adequate resources for access to controlled substances for medical purposes?

8 Social security frameworks

What are some successful models or initiatives that have integrated pain therapy into social security frameworks and packages, and how have these approaches positively impacted patient outcomes and quality of life? Moreover, what challenges may arise in implementing such programs, and how can these challenges be addressed to promote equitable access to pain management for all individuals, including vulnerable and marginalized populations?

10 Private sector partnership

What are successful examples of collaboration with the private sector and how can these be leveraged and scaled up to create broader impact and promote equitable access to controlled substances on a global scale? How can meaningful cooperation with the private sector be fostered to enhance access to controlled substances for medical purposes while ensuring patient safety and regulatory compliance?

12 Other key resources

In addition to financial considerations, what other key resources, such as human capital, infrastructure, and technological advancements, are crucial for ensuring equitable access to controlled substances for medical purposes in both high and low-resource settings? How can these resources be effectively harnessed and optimized to support national health systems and healthcare providers in their efforts to meet patients' needs for pain management and other medical conditions?

PANEL 2 - Scaling up the support

In this panel discussion, the meeting will look into the critical topic of overcoming barriers and challenges in scaling up support for enhanced access to controlled substances for medical purposes. Throughout the session, the experts will be invited to share innovative approaches and creative solutions that have proven effective in achieving scale, even in resource-constrained settings, while optimizing available resources. The panel will discuss the role the different stakeholders can play in driving meaningful change and shaping access initiatives, showcasing successful collaborations, and discussing how these could be implemented in other settings. Experts will be invited to address the challenge of ensuring sustainable funding for access and availability programmes. Furthermore, the role of research and evidence in informing scaling up efforts and enhancing access outcomes will be discussed.

1 Overcoming barriers and challenges

What can be done to overcome barriers and challenges in scaling up support, particularly in resource-constrained settings? Can you share examples of creative solutions or innovative approaches that have been employed to achieve scale while maximizing available resources?

3 Civil society organizations

How can governments and national or regional regulatory bodies play a more active role in scaling up support to achieve the commitments made by Member States through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs? Are there any examples of governments that have effectively led efforts in this regard?

5 Sustainable and long-term funding

How can we ensure sustainable, long-term funding for access and availability programmes? Which steps can be taken to ensure that the topic remains high on the agenda of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs?

2 Actions taken by governments

How can governments and national or regional regulatory bodies play a more active role in scaling up support to achieve the commitments made by Member States through the Commission on Narcotic Drugs? Are there any examples of governments that have effectively led efforts in this regard?

4 UNODC & WHO

How can the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), enhance their support in scaling up access initiatives?

6 Challenges & opportunities

What are the specific challenges and opportunities in scaling up support for enhancing access in different regions or countries? How can tailored approaches be developed to address the unique needs and contexts of each region?

PANEL 2 - Scaling up the support

7 Private sector

In what ways can the private sector contribute innovative solutions, resources, and expertise to address access challenges and support responsible use of controlled substances? What mechanisms can be established to facilitate transparent and ethical partnerships with the private sector, ensuring that access initiatives align with public health objectives and uphold the principles of patient-centered care?

9 Academia, research and evidence

What role does academia, research and evidence play in scaling up support for enhancing access? Can you share examples of evidence-based interventions or scientific studies, including health systems re-search, that have informed scaling up efforts and contributed to improved access outcomes?

11 Technology & digital innovations

How can technology and digital innovations play a transformative role in resource optimization, supply chain management, and enhancing healthcare provider knowledge? With the growing importance of telemedicine and virtual healthcare delivery, (how) can these technologies be harnessed to enhance monitoring of / access to controlled substances, especially in remote or underserved areas?

8 Innovative funding models

What innovative funding models or public-private partnerships have been successfully utilized in resource-constrained settings to support sustainable access initiatives? How can international cooperation and support be leveraged to assist these countries in overcoming financial and other resource challenges and building capacity for responsible access to controlled substances?

10 UNODC ARQ & INCB tools

What strategies can be implemented to improve the accuracy and comprehensiveness of data reporting, through the UNODC ARQ and the INCB tools, ensuring that data shared facilitates evidence-based policy decisions and supports initiatives to enhance access to controlled substances?

12 Emergency

In the context of advancing access to controlled substances in the wake of emerging public health challenges, such as pandemics or other health crises, how can lessons learned from recent experiences be incorporated into emergency preparedness and response plans?

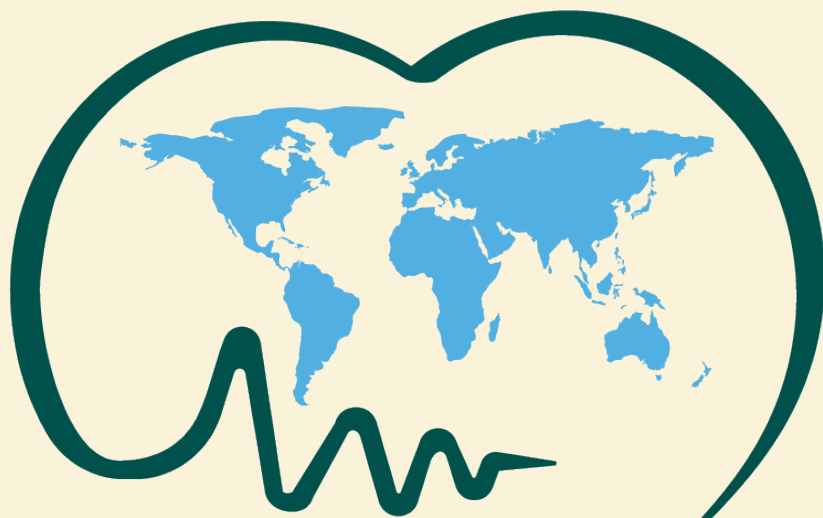
Endnotes

- 1 2020 World Drug Report, Booklet 6, Access to controlled medicines for pain management, p. 16.
- 2 2023 World Drug Report, Booklet “Special Points of Interest”, p. 8.
- 3 INCB, Supplement to the annual report of the Board for 2022 on the availability of internationally controlled substances No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes (2023), p.iii.
- 4 INCB, Supplement to the annual report of the Board for 2022 on the availability of internationally controlled substances No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes (2023), p.9.
- 5 2018 WHO Integrating palliative care and symptom relief into primary health care : A WHO guide for planners, implementers and managers [9789241514477-eng.pdf](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241514477-eng) (who.int), p.41.
- 6 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/palliative-care>
- 7 WHO, 16 June 2023, [New release: People with medical needs are “left behind in pain” reveals new report](https://www.who.int/news/2023/06/16)
- 8 No Patient Left Behind: Progress in Ensuring Adequate Access to Internationally Controlled Substances for Medical and Scientific Purposes (E/INCB/2022/1/Supp.1) <https://www.incb.org/incb/en/publications/annual-reports/annual-report.html>
- 9 [Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/goal-3/)
- 10 [international_ghs-report-2022_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/communicable-diseases/news-and-events/news/2022/09/international-ghs-report-2022-en)
- 11 [availability_accessibility_e-learning \(unodc.org\)](https://www.unodc.org/en/learning/availability-accessibility-e-learning)

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**NO PATIENT
LEFT BEHIND**