



**UNODC**  
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



**PTRS**  
PREVENTION TREATMENT  
REHABILITATION SECTION

# #ScaleUp

**Scalable interventions  
for the treatment and  
care of stimulant use  
disorders**





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# 1. Background

There is a growing concern in several regions of the world due to the significant levels of substance use (amphetamine-type stimulants, cocaine, ecstasy etc.) for non-medical purposes. In 2021, stimulants were the second most commonly used internationally controlled substance worldwide, with cannabis being the most widely used. The total number of people using drugs worldwide was approximately 296 million that year, marking a 23% increase over the past decade. Of these, an estimated 78 million people used stimulants annually, and notably nearly as many women had used synthetic stimulants as men. Stimulant use has led to a high demand for treatment, with notable variations across subregions: stimulants being a primary drug for 11% seeking treatment in Africa, 14% in Europe, 36% in the Americas, 42% in Oceania and 48% in Asia.

Despite the rising need for efficacious interventions, no medication has yet been approved for the treatment of stimulant use disorder to date. Additionally, the implementation of evidence-based psychosocial treatment, such as contingency management (CM), cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), family therapy and continued social support remains very limited.

There is an urgent need to bridge the global treatment gap for stimulant use disorders by developing and implementing scalable interventions. While some countries are advancing research (including on pharmacological treatments), coordination across studies on key outcome measures, that would meet the regulatory requirements and the needs of affected populations, would be crucial.

**“There is an urgent need to bridge the global treatment gap for stimulant use disorders”**

UNODC is suggesting a **multi-country initiative and study on both psychosocial and pharmacological treatment of stimulant use disorder** with a focus on feasibility, safety and effectiveness in different combinations and contexts, to strengthen the evidence base for **scalable interventions** benefitting different population groups and regions in an equitable way.



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## 2.# ScaleUP initiative

#ScaleUp is a new initiative of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). It was pre-launched during the thematic sessions of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in December 2023.

It builds on previous work and publications of UNODC, partner agencies and international researchers, such as the Discussion Paper on “Stimulant Use Disorders: Current Practices and Current Perspectives” (UNODC, 2019). This document calls for the scale up of effective psychosocial treatment, as well as increased research on pharmacological treatment options with a view to increase treatment engagement, treatment retention and effective treatment options for stimulant dependence.

This publication stemmed from an expert group meeting organized by the UNODC’s Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Section (UNODC PTRS) in 2017, where leading experts in the area of stimulant use disorders from 25 countries discussed integrated models of treatment that may be effective and suitable for implementation in a variety of settings once translated and culturally adapted. Following several presentations and exchanges on the topic, the participating experts concluded that there was evidence to call for more research on psychosocial and pharmacological treatment options and to conduct multicountry effectiveness, feasibility and safety trials.



***To read the full publication,  
please scan the QR code.***


The #ScaleUp initiative will be formally launched at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2024. Interested Member States and other entities are invited to provide comments and feedback, request additional information on #ScaleUp, express their interest in participation and support the implementation of the initiative.

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# 3. Phases of implementation

**#ScaleUp implementation is envisaged in five phases:**


## PHASE 1



**1.1.** Development of evidence-based **treatment and research protocols** (for craving, withdrawal, dependence, relapse) for psychosocial/pharmacological treatment of stimulant use disorders in specialized community-based substance use disorder treatment and care programs, adapted for local environments, including in lower- and middle-income countries, as feasible.

**1.2. Assessment** of availability of promising medications for the treatment of stimulant use disorder (e.g., extended release prescription amphetamines, mirtazapine, bupropion/naltrexone and others) in different countries or regions (currently used for other indications such as treatment of ADHD, treatment of depression etc.), mapping of availability and capacity for the implementation of evidence-based psychosocial treatments (e.g., contingency management, CBT, family therapy and continued social support) and identification of interested countries to join or support #ScaleUp or elements of it.

## PHASE 2



**2. Design** and local preparation for an implementation study to test feasibility, effectiveness and safety, as well as implementation outcomes (pilot followed by a multi-country study) of elements or a combination of behavioral and pharmacological treatment and care for stimulant use disorder in specialized treatment settings - always with a view to scalability, including for low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This includes national level agreements and assessments, identification of study sites, capacity building, ensuring availability of medication, involvement of a variety of local stakeholders, local adaptation/translation of study protocols and ethics approval, identification of study participants and related implementation aspects.

## PHASE 3



**3. Implementation of multi-country study** on treatment and care of stimulant use disorders with a view to feasibility, safety, scalability and effectiveness, in line with agreed upon study protocols and outcome measures: Initially a pilot in one or a few sites is envisaged, followed by a multi-country study.

## PHASE 4



**4. Monitoring, evaluation and data analysis.**

## PHASE 5



**5. Dissemination** of study results and development of an implementation package to facilitate country level follow-up and/or recommendations for further research towards scalability.



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## 4. Expected global outcomes

### #ScaleUp will provide:

- Enhanced evidence, expertise and practical experience on scalable responses for stimulant use disorder treatment and care, in the light of increasing use of stimulants for non-medical purpose in all regions, including in LMICs.
- Co-developed and evaluated treatment and care interventions to support people with stimulant use disorders, their families and communities, considering the needs of population groups with special clinical needs.
- Contribution to human-rights and health-centred response to stimulant use disorders.
- A global platform for countries, researchers, professional associations and international agencies to mutual support and information sharing about effective interventions for the treatment and care of stimulant use disorders and their negative health and social consequences.





# 5. Background information and additional reading

[UNODC-WHO International Standards for the Treatment of Drug Use Disorders, 2020](#)

[UNODC World Drug Report, 2023](#)

UNODC Discussion Paper (2019): Treatment of Stimulant Use Disorders: Current practices and promising perspectives.

[English version](#)

[Russian version](#)

[Continuing Increase in Stimulant Dependence - Time to Implement Medical Treatment.](#) (Bisaga A. et. al) Can J Psychiatry 2022 Jul;67(7):507-511. doi: 10.1177/07067437221083505. Epub 2022 Mar 14.\*

[ASAM guidelines \(2023\): Management of Stimulant Use Disorder.\\*](#)

[FDA requirements for stimulant use disorder treatment medication development \(2023\).\\*](#)



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