New Strategies for New Psychoactive Substances: A Public Health Approach

The emergence of novel psychoactive substances (NPS) – ranging from synthetic cannabinoids such as K2, to synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, to traditional plants such as kratom – poses a number of challenges for policymakers, media covering these issues, medical and social service providers, and people who use these substances. Unfortunately, current media and policy responses to NPS have been largely fueled by misinformation rather than facts.

This summit will share what is currently known about NPS, identify areas for future research, discuss strategies both for intervening when use becomes harmful and for new forms of drug regulation, and explore how messaging and media about NPS can become more constructive.

The summit will lay the foundation for a series of recommendations for researchers, policymakers, medical and social service providers, media, and people who use drugs.

June 9th at 7:00 – 9:00 pm
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
524 W 59th Street, New York, NY 10019

June 10th at 8:30 – 5:00 pm
The New School, The Bob and Sheila Hoerle Lecture Hall, UL105,
University Center, 63 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10003

Sponsors
John & Laura Arnold
Center for Motivation and Change
Center for Optimal Living
Families for Sensible Drug Policies
New York State Psychological Association’s Division on Addiction

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Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS)
New York Academy of Medicine
New York Harm Reduction Educators
Picture the Homeless
Students for Sensible Drug Policy
VOCAL-NY

Hosted by:
7:00 - 7:15pm
Welcome
Ric Curtis, Professor of Anthropology and Chairman of the Department of Law, Police Science & Criminal Justice Administration at John Jay College
Julie Netherland, Director, Office of Academic Engagement, Drug Policy Alliance

7:15 - 9:00pm

Why do people use NPS?
Before we can discuss what to do about NPS, it is important to understand the range of reasons why people use NPS, specifically, and psychoactive drugs in general. What motivates use? What benefits might be derived from their use? Are there different communities of people who use for different reasons? If so, how do they differ? How do existing drug policies influence the use of these substances? How does or should understanding the underlying reasons for use shape our responses?

Moderator
Sheila Vakharia  Assistant Professor, Social Work, Long Island University

Panelists
Hillary Kunins  Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
John Stogner  Assistant Professor Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of North Carolina Charlotte
Tarik Najeddine  Independent Researcher & Harm Reduction Coordinator
Kassandra Frederique  Director, New York Policy Office, Drug Policy Alliance
Levele Pointer  New York Harm Reduction Educators and VOCAL-NY
Joyce Rivera  Founder and Executive Director, St. Ann’s Corner of Harm Reduction

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Getting beyond the myths: What do we actually know about NPS?
Although many NPS are not all that new, responses from both media and policymakers have often been based on little information or misinformation. What exactly are NPS (including synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic opioids, cathinones, kratom, etc.)? What are their effects – both harmful and potentially beneficial? What do we know about who is using NPS? In which parts of the country are they being used? What do we know about trends in their use? What don’t we know and what needs more research?

Moderator
Alyssa Aguilera  Co-Executive Director, VOCAL-NY

Panelists
Joseph Palamar  Assistant Professor, Department of Population Health, New York University
Michelle Nolan  Epidemiologist, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
Terrell Jones  Outreach and Advocacy Program Manager, New York Harm Reduction Educators
Lewis Nelson  Professor, New York University School of Medicine and Director, Fellowship in Medical Toxicology, New York City Poison Control Center
Adriana Joseph  Research Technician, Nathan S. Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research
Public health, harm reduction, and policy interventions

NPS provide an opportunity to rethink our failed approach to prohibitionist drug policies and to conceptualize innovative approaches to responding to drugs. What can we do in the short term to minimize and address the harms of NPS? What public health, clinical and harm reduction interventions might be needed? What policy changes might help? Can we envision new regulatory schemes that do not rely on criminalization? What can we learn from other countries about how to respond to NPS?

Moderator
Stefanie Jones  Director of Audience Development, Drug Policy Alliance

Panelists
John Stogner  Associate Professor Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of North Carolina Charlotte
Josie Smith  Head of Substance Misuse and Integrated Health Protection Risk Programme, Public Health Wales
Michael Benibgui  Senior Clinical Psychologist, Center for Optimal Living
Kirstie Douse  Head of Legal Services, Release
Adrian Feliciano  Harm Reduction Coordinator, BOOM! Health

Break

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June 10, 8:30am - 5:00pm
The New School for Social Research

3:00 - 4:30pm  
**Drug scares, media, and messaging**
Drug scares or panics follow a recognizable pattern that includes exaggerated fears about a new substance, an absence of concrete information, and associating the new substance with a marginalized group. How do NPS fit or defy the “drug scare” model? What role do media and messaging play in shaping policy responses to NPS? What role should the media be playing and what tools do they need to do so?

**Moderator**
Sharda Sekaran  
Managing Director, Communications, Drug Policy Alliance

**Panelists**
Maia Szalavitz  
Reporter and author
Samuel Roberts  
Director of Columbia University’s Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) and Associate Professor of History and Sociomedical Sciences, Columbia University
Tana Ganeva  
Deputy Editor, The Influence
Philip Alcabes  
Professor of Public Health, Adelphi University and Visiting Professor, Hunter College, the City University of New York
Nikita Price  
Civil Rights Organizer, Picture the Homeless

4:30 - 5:00pm  
**Closing: Where do we go from here?**
Next steps for researchers, policymakers, media, providers, and people who use drugs.

**Moderator**
Kassandra Frederique  
Director, New York Policy Office, Drug Policy Alliance

**Panelists**
Sharda Sekaran  
Managing Director, Communications, Drug Policy Alliance
Grant Smith  
Deputy Director, Office of National Affairs, Drug Policy Alliance
Peter Schafer  
Deputy Director, Family Health and Disparities, Center for Health Policy and Programs, New York Academy of Medicine
William Matthews  
Physician Assistant, Harm Reduction Coalition
Hiawatha Collins  
Peer Specialist, Harm Reduction Coalition and VOCAL Board Member
About the Speakers

Alyssa Aguilera is the Co-Executive Director at VOCAL-NY, a grassroots community organizing group that builds power among low-income people impacted by HIV/AIDS, the drug war, and mass incarceration. At VOCAL, Alyssa oversees the organization's advocacy, development, and communications work. She also leads campaigns to reform discriminatory policing practices, create alternatives to the drug war, and address the collateral consequences of mass incarceration. Alyssa has previously organized in the Health Justice program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, Boston Workers Alliance, and SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign. She is a graduate of Harvard College.

Philip Alcabes, PhD, is Professor in the Department of Allied Health at Adelphi University and Visiting Professor at Hunter College, CUNY. Alcabes studies the history, ethics, and policy of public health. His recent essays on psychoactive drugs and the concept of healing appeared in The American Scholar in 2015 and '16. He is working on a book about psychic disturbance and psychoactive drugs in the contemporary culture.

Michael Benibgui, PhD, is a senior clinical psychologist and founding member at the Center for Optimal Living, specializing in Integrative Harm Reduction Psychotherapy, and a research scientist in the fields of substance abuse, and the bio-psycho-social impacts of stress on mental/physical health. He has directed mental health and harm reduction based drug treatment programs for NYC community-based organizations and clinical trials of novel treatment approaches at Columbia University Medical Center. The Center for Optimal Living uses a compassionate, personalized approach to treat addictive behaviors of all kinds and helps people learn about the risks and benefits of using psychoactive substances.

Hiawatha Collins has been a leader of VOCAL-NY’s Users Union since 2009, contributing to campaigns to pass new statewide overdose prevention and syringe access laws, strengthen patient rights in methadone programs, and improve healthcare in the NYC shelter system. He currently works as the Harm Reduction Specialist at the Harm Reduction Coalition and coordinates the NYC Peer Network. Hiawatha is a former Marine, who has frequently experienced homelessness during the past decade, and has been incarcerated for drug offenses. He has been quoted in the Daily News and Buffalo News.

Ric Curtis is a Professor of Anthropology at John Jay College and Chairman of the Department of Law, Police Science & Criminal Justice Administration. He is a Board member at 4 harm reduction programs in the NYC area: Family Services Network of NY, Inc. (1994), Boom! Health, Inc. (1998), the After Hours Project, Inc (2002), and Community Action for Social Justice, Inc. (2013).

Kirstie Douse has been Head of Legal Services at Release, the UK centre of expertise on drugs and drugs law, since 2012 after joining there as lawyer in 2008. Before joining Release, Kirstie practiced as a lawyer specialising in criminal defence. Having become disillusioned with the way people who use drugs are dealt with in the criminal justice system, Kirstie joined Release with a view to tackling the issues at an earlier stage in proceedings by challenging policy and procedure. In addition to managing the Legal Team, Kirstie continues to advise clients at Release’s legal surgeries and via the legal helpline. She has become increasingly involved in the organisation’s policy and campaign work and is passionate about tackling the stigma faced by people who use drugs. Recently this policy work has

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focused on challenging the new Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, briefing UK Parliament on the problems related to this and advising the public and professionals on the impact of the legislation. Kirstie also contributes to Release publications, provides comment in the media on legal and policy issues relating to drugs, and has presented at national and international conferences.

Since graduating with his BA in Communications and Psychology, Adrian Feliciano has been dedicated to non-profit community work, providing services to those most marginalized in his home community of the Bronx. He has worked in many areas, including outreach, case management and supervising a team of direct service providers assisting participants with management of chronic illnesses. Now in his role as a Harm Reduction Coordinator at BOOM!Health's Harm Reduction Center, Adrian oversees daily operations of the Syringe Exchange Program and continues to work with marginalized populations, specifically homeless substance users, and actively represents BOOM!Health on various coalitions of community based organizations and community stakeholders to address the needs of the most marginalized and underserved residents of the Bronx.

Kassandra Frederique is New York York State Director at the Drug Policy Alliance. Kassandra works to build powerful coalitions in communities devastated by drug misuse and the war on drugs. Her passion for challenging social oppression and inequalities led her to work on ending the drug war.

Tana Ganeva is Deputy Editor of the Influence, where she covers drug policy and criminal justice. Formerly, she was managing editor of AlterNet.org. At AlterNet, she worked on a variety of issues, including homelessness, politics and economic policy.

Stefanie Jones is Director of Audience Development at the Drug Policy Alliance, based in New York. She oversees outreach to specific communities on drug use and drug policy topics, including on novel psychoactive substances (NPS), DPAs youth drug education work and the Music Fan program, which advocates for harm reduction services at festivals, concerts and clubs. In her prior role as event manager, she produced four editions of the biennial International Drug Policy Reform Conference.

Terrell Jones is the Outreach and Advocacy Program Manager at New York Harm Reduction Educators. Terrell is a passionate advocate, activist, and inspiration for drug users, sex workers, the homeless, and other marginalized communities. He is a former drug user, drug dealer, and has been incarcerated. Terrell has been in the harm reduction field for over 10 years and worked his way up from participant, to peer, to staff. He is now the face of harm reduction.

Adriana M. Joseph completed her Master’s in Public Health at New York University in 2013 concentrating in community health. Adriana joined the Center for Research on Cultural and Structural Equity in Behavioral Health (C-CASE) in 2014 and brings expertise in statistical analysis and mapping techniques. She is seasoned in policy-directed research and policy-informed interventions specifically involving NYS Medicaid Redesign, Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) program, and Health Homes.

Hillary Kunins, MD, MPH, MS, is Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Use Prevention, Care at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) where she leads efforts to reduce health consequences of alcohol and other drug use in NYC. Before joining DOHMH, Dr. Kunins provided primary and addiction care in the Bronx for more than 10 years and directed the primary care/social internal medicine residency at Montefiore Medical Center.

William Matthews is a Physician Assistant with the Harm Reduction Coalition focusing on overdose prevention and the NY State DOH's naloxone program. He also works in primary care one morning a week for Project Renewal at their Third Street Homeless Shelter. Prior to becoming a Physician Assistant, he was a classical guitarist performing solo concerts as a ‘cultural ambassador’ for the State Department in over 75 countries.
Tarik Najeddine is an independent researcher & harm reduction coordinator, specializing on the intersection between dance music, trauma & substance use. He has done drug checking, coordinated harm reduction teams, and created training materials for event staff. After earning his masters of arts in clinical psychology at Columbia University, he began volunteering for event production companies & non-profits around the country, coordinating crisis intervention plans & giving presentations on new threats to the community.

Lewis Nelson is a Professor in the Department of Emergency Medicine at New York University School of Medicine and attending physician at both NYU Langone Medical Center and Bellevue Hospital Center. Director of the Fellowship in Medical Toxicology at NYUSOM and the New York City Poison Control Center, Dr. Nelson is actively involved in research, scholarship, policy, and educational efforts, with a focus on both opioid toxicity and emerging psychoactive substances.

Julie Netherland, PhD, is the Director of the Office of Academic Engagement for the Drug Policy Alliance. In that role, she advances drug policy reform by supporting scholars in doing advocacy, convening experts from a range of disciplines to inform the field, and strengthening DPA’s use of research and scholarship in developing and advancing its policy positions. Dr. Netherland holds a PhD in sociology from the City University of New York Graduate Center, a Masters in Social Work from Boston University, and BA from Bryn Mawr College.

Michelle L. Nolan, MPH, is an Epidemiologist at the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the Bureau of Alcohol, Drug Use, Prevention, Care and Treatment where she analyses real-time data and conducts research to inform public health responses aimed at reducing overdose mortality. Before joining DOHMH, she worked at the International Center for AIDS Care and Treatment Programs and was an Epi Scholar with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Joseph Palamar is an Assistant Professor of Population Health at NYU Langone Medical Center and a Research Affiliate at the NYU Center for Drug Use and HIV Research. He is principal investigator on two federally funded research studies examining use of novel psychoactive substances, with a focus on use by nightclub and festival attendees in NYC. He has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and frequently discusses drug use and drug policy in the mainstream media.

Levele Pointer is a Peer Educator with New York Harm Reduction Educators (NYHRE) and a long-standing community leader with VOCAL-NY. Armed with the lived experience as a victim of the drug war and his passionate commitment for social justice, he has been involved in several grassroots campaigns. He has done everything from leading protests in the street to sitting down in advocacy meetings with elected officials to providing harm reduction services in the Bronx and Harlem.

Nikita Price is the Civil Rights Organizer at Picture the Homeless. This campaign focuses on selective police enforcement against the Homeless and the poor in New York. While navigating the NYC shelter system, Nikita joined Picture the Homeless in 2006 as a member and was later hired as a full time organizer. He is presently raising two lovely daughters as a single father and is passionate in the role of Father and Social Justice Organizer (CPR).

27 years ago, Joyce Rivera, at the height of the political-public health travesty of injection-related HIV/AIDS, and while conducting ethnographic research among street outreach workers and active drug users in several NYC neighborhoods, endeared a high-level drug dealer to the unintended consequences of HIV/AIDS, and with additional street support began providing syringe access to PWID. Joyce may be the longest standing Founder-Executive of a Syringe Access program in the US. She is ABD and completing her analysis of NYC/NYS syringe access policy 1988-2014 at the Graduate Center. In the Fall, she returns to John Jay as Adjunct Lecturer in the Anthropology Department.
Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr., is Director of Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) and Associate Professor of History and Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia. He is the author of Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation (2009), and is currently writing a book on the history of race and the politics of addiction during the heroin epidemics between the 1950s and the early 1990s.

Peter Schafer is the Deputy Director for Family Health and Disparities at the New York Academy of Medicine. His research and policy development work focuses on harm reduction approaches to drug policy and the integration of social determinants of health into health care reform efforts through the inclusion of non-medical community-based service providers.

Sharda Sekaran originally joined the Drug Policy Alliance in 2000 and served for several years as Associate Director of Public Policy and Community Outreach. Subsequently, Sharda co-founded a human rights group called the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative (NESRI) and served as Associate Director. She went on to work as a communications director and consultant for a number of organizations. She returned to the Drug Policy Alliance in 2013 as Managing Director of Communications.

Grant Smith is Deputy Director of national affairs for the Drug Policy Alliance. He works to shape policy and advance DPAs federal legislative agenda in Washington. His areas of focus include new psychoactive substances, drug overdose prevention, and civil asset forfeiture. A native of Savannah, Georgia, Smith was drawn into drug policy reform after learning about the racial disparities inherent in the drug war.

With over 25 years experience in the drugs field both front line and research, Josie Smith now heads up the Integrated Health Protection Risk Programme encompassing policy, epidemiological, psychological and social/behavioural factors relating to substance use. She has been instrumental in developing and implementing highly innovative policies and harm reduction projects including WEDINOS: a national web-based profiling and information project for new psychoactive substances and IPEDINFO – for people injecting image/performance enhancing and other drugs.

John Stogner, PhD, MPH, is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice and Criminology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His teaching and research generally focuses on substance use with the primary emphasis being novel and emerging drug issues. Dr. Stogner authored The Nature and Theory of Crime and Emerging Trends in Drug Use and Distribution. His research has appeared in journals such as Pediatrics, Alcohol and Alcoholism, Addictive Behaviors, and Justice Quarterly.

Maia Szalavitz is a neuroscience journalist and author or co-author of seven books. Her most recent, Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction, was published in April, 2016. She writes for major publications including TIME, the New York Times, Scientific American, the Washington Post, VICE and Pacific Standard.

Jenifer Talley is a clinical psychologist and Assistant Director of The Center for Optimal Living, an outpatient psychotherapy practice. She is also Assistant Director of the Concentration in Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counseling and Director of the Harm Reduction Psychotherapy Certificate Program at The New School. She has expertise in harm reduction psychotherapy, trauma-informed care and integrates mindfulness practices in her work.

Sheila P. Vakharia is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at LIU Brooklyn, and she coordinates the Substance Abuse Counseling Concentration in the Masters of Social Work program. Her research and teaching interests include harm reduction therapy, drug policy reform, drug user stigma, overdose and overdose prevention, and social work education. Sheila is on the Board of HAMS Harm Reduction Network and is a member of the Harm Reduction Therapy Research Group.