

# APACC 2024 Daily Highlight

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E-mail: [idf@ioncol.com](mailto:idf@ioncol.com)  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 09,  
Hujialou Post Office, Beijing,  
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Infectious Disease Frontier

# Asia-Pacific AIDS & Co-Infections Conference (APACC) 2024

27-29 June 2024  
Hong Kong · China





# APACC

## Welcome Program Chairs 2024



Joseph Tucker, MD, PhD, AM  
UNC Chapel Hill, United States



Reena Rajasuriar, MPharm, PhD  
University of Malaya, Malaysia



Grace Chung-Yan Lui, MBChB (Hons), FHKCP, FHKAM  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Dear colleagues,**

The Asia-Pacific AIDS & Co-Infections Conference (APACC) 2024 will be held in Hong Kong as a hybrid conference on 27-29 June 2024.

Over the years, enormous progress has been made in the fight against HIV and co-infections. Both academia and industry have contributed greatly to equipping the medical community with the best medications and expertise possible to optimally treat people living with HIV. However, international platforms for scientific interchange are not always accessible to medical professionals worldwide due to budget and travel restrictions. Also, most major conferences do not usually address local and regional issues. In particular, the Asian medical community in this field of research currently has very few platforms that serve the needs of HIV healthcare professionals in this region.

APACC provides a much-needed scientific platform that focuses on the developments, issues, and needs in the Asia-Pacific region. Researchers have the opportunity to present and discuss the latest developments and are offered opportunities for interaction, networking, and building collaborations. Top experts integrate science and clinical practice through state-of-the-art lectures, clinical case discussions, round table discussions, and debates in order to reach a consensus on best practices and inform how treatment guidelines are implemented.

We look forward to meeting you at APACC 2024!

Reena Rajasuriar, Joseph Tucker, and Grace Chung-Yan Lui,  
Co-chairs, APACC 2024

Day 1 - Thursday, 27 June 2024	
13:30-14:45 HKT	Plenary Session 1-Opening Session
15:00 HKT	Coffee Break, Exhibition, & Poster Viewing
16:00-16:55 HKT	Parallel Session 1: Advanced HIV Disease in Asia-Pacific
16:00-17:00 HKT	Parallel Session 2: Abstract-Driven Session- Implementation
17:00-18:00 HKT	Industry Supported Symposium
18:00 HKT	Welcome Reception, Exhibition & Poster Viewing

## Exploring New Therapies: Addressing Weight Gain and Metabolic Issues in HIV Treatment



Integrase strand transfer inhibitors (INSTIs), while effective in suppressing HIV, have raised safety concerns due to weight gain and metabolic complications, posing additional health risks and impacting patients' quality of life, potentially leading to long-term

complications such as cardiovascular diseases.

Global researchers have been seeking solutions to mitigate these side effects, including optimizing drug combinations, adjusting dosages, or developing novel antiretroviral drugs to maintain therapeutic efficacy while reducing adverse effects.

Dr. Fujie Zhang and his colleagues conducted the SPRINT study, comparing the new non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor ainoovirine (ANV) with the traditional boosted elvitegravir (EVG) regimen. The study demonstrated ANV-based regimen's advantage in reducing weight gain and improving lipid metabolism, while ensuring virological suppression non-inferior to the boosted EVG regimen. This study not only offers people living with HIV a safer and effective treatment option but also holds profound significance for improving overall health and quality of life.

Stay tuned for more in-depth information on this trial in a detailed oral presentation by Dr. Fujie Zhang on the second day of the conference, Parallel Session 4: Abstract-Driven Session - Treatment.

## Integrating STIs Care in HIV Management: Bangkok's Community-Led Approach

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a pervasive public health issue, especially challenging in resource-limited settings where traditional management methods are often symptom-based, lacking in sensitivity and specificity. The intersection of STIs with HIV infection is particularly concerning, as HIV-positive individuals are more susceptible to STIs, which in turn can increase HIV viral loads and transmission risks.

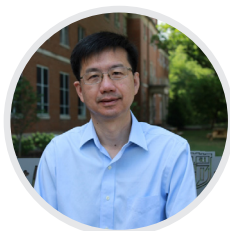
A groundbreaking study in Bangkok has integrated STIs testing and treatment within same-day antiretroviral treatment (SDART) at community-led clinics. This innovative approach addresses the critical gap in STIs management for HIV-positive individuals, providing a comprehensive framework for diagnosis and immediate treatment. The study emphasizes the importance of timely STIs management, noting the challenges in linking HIV treatment services with rapid STI care.

The study's insights advocate for the broader integration of same-day STIs testing and treatment within community clinics, presenting a compelling strategy to mitigate the impacts of HIV and STIs. It calls for enhanced policy frameworks and community engagement to foster innovation in healthcare delivery, aiming to achieve a significant reduction in HIV and STIs co-infections.

### Day 2 - Friday, 28 June 2024

8:00-8:30 HKT	Capacity-Building Session 1: Design for Success: Using Design Thinking in Sti/HIV Programs and Services	12:45 HKT	Lunch & Poster Viewing
8:00-9:00 HKT	Capacity-Building Session 2: Person-Centered Communication Skills in Client-Provider Interactions and Scientific Writing	14:00-14:50 HKT	Parallel Session 5: Women's Health - HPV
09:00-9:50 HKT	Plenary Session 2: Brain & HIV- Neurocognitive Decline in Aging PLWHIV	14:00-15:00 HKT	Parallel Session 6: Abstract-Driven Session - Prevention
10:00 HKT	Coffee Break, Exhibition, & Poster Viewing	15:30 HKT	Coffee Break & Exhibition
10:45-11:40 HKT	Parallel Session 3: Innovations in Diagnostic Testing	16:00 HKT	DEBATE: Middle-Aged and Older Adults Living with HIV Should Be on a Statin
10:45-11:45 HKT	Parallel Session 4: Abstract-Driven Session - Treatment	17:00-17:55 HKT	Parallel Session 7: Adolescents Transitioning to Adult Care
11:45 HKT	Guided Poster Tour	17:00-17:40 HKT	Parallel Session 8: Abstract-Driven Session - Digital Innovations

## Dr. Shenglan Tang: Implementation and Policy of HPV Vaccination



Cervical cancer remains a major threat to women's health globally, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. In this conference, Dr. Shenglan Tang will deliver a presentation entitled Implementation / Policy of HPV Vaccination. The presentation

emphasized the urgency and complexity of implementing human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination strategies and discussed the current policies and challenges of HPV vaccination in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the Asia-Pacific, there is a marked disparity in cervical cancer burden, with higher incidence and mortality rates in Pacific Island nations compared to high-income countries. To improve coverage, the updated World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations suggest a two-dose schedule for girls aged 9 to 14, with options for a single-dose schedule for those aged 9 to 20. The implementation of HPV vaccines in the region faces several challenges, including financing, logistical issues, vaccine hesitancy, and disparities in healthcare infrastructure. Additionally, strategic partnerships with organizations such as The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI) are crucial, as they support HPV vaccination as one of their highest-impact vaccines, contributing to gender equity and strengthening adolescent immunization platforms. The presentation emphasizes the need for multi-faceted approaches to address these challenges, such as integrating HPV vaccination into primary healthcare and prioritizing immunocompromised populations. Ensuring high-quality and sustainable vaccination programs is essential for reducing the cervical cancer burden and achieving global health targets.

**More information will be presented in the conference report:**

Day 2	Friday, 28 June 2024
Parallel Session 5	Women's Health - HPV
14:00 HKT	Implementation / Policy of HPV Vaccination
14:20 HKT	Screening HPV - Rose Project

## Dr. Woo Yin Ling: ROSE Program for HPV Screening



Dr. Woo Yin Ling will introduce the ROSE Program - a revolutionary cervical screening program. Its unique five-pillar approach combines education, advocacy and comprehensive care to achieve integrated screening services.

Program ROSE is an innovative cervical screening that enables and empowers women to perform their own cervical screening using our unique and signature human papillomavirus (HPV) polymerase chain reaction (PCR) self-sampling test. The program was designed in such a way that offers women the dignified choice of using a self-swab which is simple, painless, and effective. HPV PCR test, the gold standard for primary cervical screening is performed on the processed swabs (which can remain at room temperature for up to 2 weeks before processing) and prompt delivery of results via a digital health platform using mobile technology within 3 weeks. Personalized care for those who are screened positive and linkage to care for treatment are offered to women as part of Program ROSE.

### 5 Pillars Approach

A pioneer and revolutionary HPV PCR self-sampling cervical cancer screening methodology with 5 pillars inclusive of education & advocacy to provide an integrated screening service with linkage to care.

- 1. Education & Advocacy**  
Education of the public and healthcare professionals and advocacy for cervical cancer elimination.
- 2. Self-Sampling**  
Self-sampling by women themselves instead of pap smear screening by healthcare professional.
- 3. Validated PCR Testing**  
Clinically validated HPV PCR assay and a validated protocol for the testing of self-collected specimens for HPV-based cervical screening.
- 4. Digital Health Platform**  
Use secure digital health platform that enables registration & follow-up communicated via mobile phone.
- 5. Linkage to Care**  
ROSE Contact Centre refers positive cases for treatment and follow-up care.

To date, Program ROSE has screened more than 29,000 of the underserved population in Malaysia with an overall 88% of women identified as needing follow-up being seen at a tertiary centre. This is a strong testament of a successful community-based program facilitated by digital technology.

## Enhancing PrEP Adherence Among MSM in China: The Role of Co-Created Digital Intervention

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) serves as a vital strategy in the fight against HIV infections among men who have sex with men (MSM). With the approval of tenofovir disoproxil fumarate/emtricitabine (TDF/FTC) in China, the first HIV prevention medicine, a significant advancement has been made. However, the implementation of PrEP faces challenges, particularly in engaging the at-risk population and ensuring adherence.

The availability of TDF/FTC is a step forward, but effective scaling requires innovative engagement strategies. Adherence complexity and the demand for ongoing health education are notable obstacles.

Dr. Chunyan Li and her colleagues conducted a study using a

stepped-wedge design investigated the effectiveness of co-created digital interventions to boost PrEP adherence among MSM. The intervention, delivered through WeChat, featured personalized messages, videos, and images developed with participant input. It showed a slight increase in reported adherence, emphasizing the value of personalized communication.

The study's results indicate the potential of digital interventions in enhancing PrEP adherence and suggest that co-creation with the target audience can yield more impactful health communication strategies.

For a detailed exploration of the study's methodology and key findings, please follow Dr. Chunyan Li's oral presentation in Parallel Session 6: Abstract-Driven Session - Prevention.

## DEBATE: Middle-Aged and Older Adults Living with HIV Should Be on a Statin ?



Dr. Joseph Tucker  
Moderator

Statins, widely prescribed for cardiovascular risk reduction, have sparked debate over their use in middle-aged and older adults living with HIV. The controversy revolves around the potential benefits of managing lipid profiles and the risk of interactions with antiretroviral therapy, along with concerns about side effects that could impact quality of life. Balancing the necessity for cardiovascular protection with the complexities of HIV care presents a clinical conundrum.



Dr. Gary Han Siong Toh  
Pro Standpoint

On the second day of the APACC 2024 conference, Dr. Joseph Tucker will lead a crucial debate on this topic, with Dr. Gary Han Siong Toh advocating for the use of statins in this population and Dr. Sanjay Pujari challenging their routine prescription. Both experts bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table, setting the stage for a robust and enlightening exchange.



Dr. Sanjay Pujari  
Con Standpoint

This debate will delve into the complexities of statin therapy as part of HIV management. It offers a platform for presenting a range of viewpoints, fostering important dialogue, and revealing innovative perspectives on health management for the aging HIV-positive community. Attendees will have the opportunity to hear diverse views, engage in vital discussions, and gain fresh insights on the health management of aging people living with HIV.

## Tailoring PrEP for MSM: Multi-Regional Perspectives

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a cornerstone in the fight against HIV, especially critical for men who have sex with men (MSM). During the Parallel Session 6: Abstract-Driven Session - Prevention at this conference, multiple studies have delved into the preferences and behaviors of the MSM community to further explore ways to optimize PrEP.

A study from Australia delves into the preferences of MSM for accessing PrEP, revealing a pronounced inclination towards long-acting formulations and the convenience of pharmacy-based services. It emphasizes the decisive role of cost, side effects, and the inclusion of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) testing in shaping program preferences.

Another Vietnamese study examined the effects of changing PrEP regimens on retention rates among MSM in Hanoi. The findings suggest that the flexibility to switch between PrEP options is not only common but also linked to better retention, advocating for a more adaptable approach to PrEP globally.

A pan-Asian study provides a comprehensive assessment of HIV prevention coverage, uncovering considerable disparities in risk behaviors and PrEP adoption across 15 countries. It calls for an expansion of PrEP availability and a reinforcement of condom use as critical steps in the battle against HIV transmission.

These research endeavors collectively contribute to a richer understanding of the diverse needs and responses within the MSM community. They highlight the importance of personalized PrEP strategies in enhancing uptake and effectiveness.



## Digital Innovations in HIV Services: Enhancing Access and Efficiencies

The integration of digital tools in HIV care is revolutionizing access and outcomes. In Parallel Session 8: Abstract-Driven Session-Digital Innovations at the conference, several studies demonstrate the effectiveness of digital innovative approaches in HIV prevention and control.

A cluster randomized controlled trial in Cambodia developed a mobile health intervention that significantly enhanced female entertainment workers' engagement with health services, particularly reducing forced drinking incidents and facilitating escorted referrals. In Hong Kong, an artificial intelligence-powered Chatbot was found to be as effective as human counselors in providing real-time support for HIV self-testing, markedly increasing the rate of counseling received alongside testing.

Utilizing machine learning algorithms, a Thai study predicted HIV infection among young men who have sex with men, identifying routine testing and age as significant predictors and advocating for more focused interventions.

Lastly, a mobile health approach in promoting regular HIV testing among men who have sex with men was evaluated, highlighting the growing preference for self-testing as a more private alternative.

These studies collectively illustrate the profound benefits of digital innovations in HIV services, emphasizing improved accessibility and personalized care. Looking ahead, the future of HIV care is set to be even more integrated with technology, offering efficient and tailored solutions.



## Dr. Owen Tsang: Real-World Experience of Long-Acting ARVs in Hong Kong



Dr. Owen Tsang will present a lecture titled "Real-World Experience - Hong Kong" at the conference. In the interview before the conference, he shared the experience of the real-world application of long-acting antiretroviral (ARV) in Hong Kong, examining their benefits, current obstacles, and the pivotal role of future research in enhancing HIV treatment strategies.

**1 Infectious Disease Frontier:** What significant progress has been made in HIV long-acting ARV drugs in recent years? What challenges remain in its application and promotion?

**Dr. Owen Tsang:** Significant progress has been made in HIV long-acting antiretroviral therapies (ARTs), including injectables and implantables. Injectable ARVs like cabotegravir and rilpivirine have proven effective in maintaining viral suppression and preventing HIV transmission. This combination has been registered for use in virologically suppressed patients without genotypic resistance and chronic hepatitis B. Implantable devices, such as the tenofovir alafenamide (TAF) implant, preliminary data suggest that it can offer long-lasting protection against HIV for several months or even a year. However, challenges remain in the application and promotion of long-acting ARV treatments. Implementing these treatments in real-world settings requires addressing healthcare infrastructure, training healthcare providers, and integrating them into existing systems. Accessibility and affordability are concerns, as long-acting ARVs are currently more expensive than oral therapies, hindering access for individuals in resource-limited settings. Acceptance and adherence to these treatments vary among individuals, necessitating education and support to address concerns about injections, implants, and clinic visits. Ensuring safety and monitoring potential long-term side effects is crucial. Drug resistance and viral rebound must be monitored, as they can impact treatment effectiveness.

**2 Infectious Disease Frontier:** Could you share Hong Kong's real-world experience in the use and promotion of long-acting ARVs?

**Dr. Owen Tsang:** Preliminary data suggested that the injectable ARVs cabotegravir and rilpivirine are well accepted and tolerated by most of our patients. However, attention should be taken with patients who are seronegative for hepatitis B viral infection, especially for those who have had no immunologic response to a full course of hepatitis B vaccination.

**3 Infectious Disease Frontier:** What important research and development directions do you think future long-acting ARVs will have?

**Dr. Owen Tsang:** Firstly, the pursuit of novel drug delivery systems, such as subcutaneous or intramuscular injectables, implants, or patches, will aim to improve convenience and adherence. Secondly, efforts will be made to enhance drug potency and reduce toxicity, allowing for lower dosing and minimizing side effects. Additionally, there will be a push to develop multi-drug combinations with longer half-lives, reducing the need for multiple medications. Furthermore, the exploration of new drug targets and mechanisms of action will expand therapeutic options.

**More information will be presented in the conference report:**

Day 3	Saturday, 29 June 2024
Parallel Session 9	Long-acting ARV
09:15 HKT	Real-World Experience - Hong Kong
Presenter	Owen Tsang, MBChB, MRCP, FHKCP, FHKAM, MTH, DTM&H, LSHTM, FRCP Princess Margaret Hospital, Hong Kong

## Empowering Communities: Innovative Strategies for Viral Disease Management and Prevention

On Day 3 of APACC 2024, experts will take a comprehensive look at decentralized care, a healthcare delivery model that provides patients with better quality and more personalized care. The plenary session "Implementation of Decentralized Care" will spotlight groundbreaking research that exemplifies this paradigm shift.

A cross-sectional observational study from Vietnam, presented by Bao Vu Ngoc, integrates hepatitis C virus self-testing (HCVST) into HIV and harm reduction services. This innovative approach increases HCV testing uptake and treatment initiation among key populations and people living with HIV. This study emphasizes the effectiveness of HCVST, especially in a community-based model that helps to reach populations at high risk that have not been previously covered.

Another phase 4 clinical trial from China, led by Zhuoheng Yin, delves into the outcomes of a community-clinic hybrid Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) approach. This clinical trial demonstrates the feasibility of a hybrid model in reaching at-risk populations with PrEP, offering insights into adherence patterns, and the impact of alternative delivery methods like mail-order services. The study presents valuable data on the real-world application of PrEP, emphasizing the importance of flexible and accessible prevention strategies.

These studies collectively contribute to a broader narrative on the importance of decentralization in healthcare. They showcase how innovative strategies can enhance accessibility, improve patient outcomes, and contribute to the global effort to combat viral diseases. The insights gained from these presentations will not only inform policy and practice but also inspire further research into the optimization of decentralized care models.

Moving forward, the discussion around decentralized care is expected to broaden and deepen, driven by evidence-based research and a shared vision for equitable and efficient health care. The APACC Conference will serve as a beacon of innovation, guiding the way to a more inclusive, responsive and effective healthcare future.

## Transforming Healthcare: Task Shifting and Integration in Action

The integration of healthcare services is a strategic response to the increasing demand for efficient and effective health systems. Task shifting, a key component of this approach, involves delegating certain tasks from highly qualified health professionals to those with fewer qualifications, allowing for a more streamlined and accessible healthcare delivery.

Scheduled as the last session before the closing ceremony, Plenary Session 4 will delve into the critical topic of Integrated Healthcare and Task Shifting, focusing on the pivotal roles of multidisciplinary healthcare professionals in managing HIV and co-infection.

Beng Eu will address the integration of hepatitis care within primary care, emphasizing its significance in enhancing patient outcomes. Shan Chan and Preethi Raghaven will illuminate the indispensable roles of nurses and pharmacists in HIV care, highlighting their contributions to comprehensive patient support and medication management.

This session promises to offer a profound insight into the strategic delegation of tasks within healthcare, aiming to increase efficiency and accessibility. It presents a unique opportunity for attendees to engage with leading professionals and gain a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of task shifting in disease management.

The conference's closing ceremony will be preceded by this thought-provoking session, setting the stage for a reflective conclusion. It is an invitation to all to be part of a dialogue that could redefine healthcare delivery for the better.

### Day 3 - Saturday, 29 June 2024

8:00-8:40 HKT	Capacity-Building Session 3: Learning How to Use Photovoice: Bringing Voices of the Community to the Forefront through Photography
08:00 HKT	Parallel Session: Meet the Professor
09:00-09:55 HKT	Parallel Session 9: Long-acting ARV
09:00-09:55 HKT	Parallel Session 10: Migrant Healthcare Challenges
10:30-11:30 HKT	Plenary Session 3: Implementation of Decentralized Care
11:30-12:25 HKT	Plenary Session 4: Integrated Healthcare/ Task Shifting
12:30 HKT	Closure of the Meeting