

The “rise of chemsex” among gay men has been sensationalised in media and the community

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25 OCTOBER 2016 — “Chemsex” among gay and bisexual men and its link to HIV transmissions has been sensationalised in media reports and the community but LGBTI people still need targeted support, according to a world-renowned expert on drug use in LGBTI communities.

Dr Adam Bourne is visiting Australia for the upcoming Australian Professional Society on Alcohol and Other Drugs (APSAD) Conference, where he is giving the first keynote address in the conference’s history on drug use within LGBTI communities. During his visit Dr Bourne is also meeting with public health officials about strategies to address drug use in LGBTI communities.

Dr Bourne is an expert on harm reduction among people who use drugs, sexual health and HIV prevention among marginalised populations such as LGBTI people, and on “chemsex”, the use of drugs by gay men in sexual settings.

“Chemsex is something we have to remain vigilant about, but we also have to be wary of drawing simple conclusions without considering the right evidence. Only a small minority of gay men use drugs on a regular basis, and only a minority of those do so in a sexual context,” said Dr Bourne.

“Not all chemsex is risky—many men are able to manage their drug use safely and are able to negotiate safer sex in a way that works for them. Of course there are exceptions, but it would be wrong to attribute all risky sex solely to drug use.”

“HIV and STI transmission among gay men took place a long time before drugs such as crystal methamphetamine (ice) were present on the gay scene. While ice may have a role in risky sex for a small proportion of men, there are a whole host of other reasons why gay men are exposed to HIV.”

Leading up to the APSAD Conference, the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC) has called for greater awareness of the needs of LGBTI people within mainstream alcohol and other drug (AOD) services, as well as increased funding for LGBTI-specific AOD services.

“We know that LGBTI people use drugs at higher rates than the rest of the community, so we need access to services that understand our specific needs. Drug use and sex is a sensitive topic, and many LGBTI people need a safe space where they can feel comfortable to discuss these issues,” said VAC CEO Simon Ruth.

“The reality is mainstream AOD services will continue to provide most of the treatment for LGBTI people, and those services do need greater awareness of LGBTI issues. But a lot of people don’t feel comfortable accessing a mainstream service—we also need better funded LGBTI-specific services.”

Dr Bourne supported VAC’s position with examples from his work in the UK.

“We’ve certainly found in the UK that many drug services aren’t set up to deal with drug use among gay men. Research tells us that gay men often fear judgement or discrimination talking about their drug use,” he said.

ENDS

Dr Adam Bourne will be speaking at a community forum on sex, drug use and mental health for LGBTI people on Tuesday, 25 October at 7PM, at Hares & Hyenas in Fitzroy.

His keynote address at the APSAD Conference (30 October–2 November) is on Tuesday, 1 November at 1.15PM, at the Four Points by Sheraton Sydney.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact:

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