

Working in Partnership to meet the needs of LGBT substance misuse clients and chemsex

London Friend's Antidote drug & alcohol service can provide tailored support to organisations submitting tender applications to provide sexual health and substance misuse services to enable them to demonstrate how they can meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans clients. This ranges from advice on evidencing need in application stages to delivery of targeted interventions on a sub-contracted basis and developing a support package to improve LGBT competence throughout your organisation.

Why LGBT specific?

Some LGBT clients indicate they would prefer to access services provided specifically by and for LGBT people. Our service users tell us they choose targeted services because they feel safe and they believe the services will be better able to meet their needs. A survey of our service users found only 12% would feel comfortable accessing 'mainstream' services, with 53% saying they definitely would not (35% were unsure).

What are the needs of LGBT people?

A literature review by the UK Drug Policy Commission in 2010 found that LGBT people were more likely to be using drugs and developing problematic use than the population as a whole. Levels were consistently higher across the research. Despite higher levels of need they found LGBT people were less likely to engage in services, often feeling that services would not meet their needs. This is backed up by research by the LGBT Foundation's Part of the Picture study, indicating higher levels of use and lower engagement in services.

The typical patterns of using by LGBT people show low levels of opiate and crack cocaine use, the traditional focus of most substance misuse services. Use of 'club drugs' and other novel psychoactive substances (NPS) is more common. By far the biggest three problematic substances seen by Antidote are crystal methamphetamine, GHB/GBL; and mephedrone. Recent trends include a move towards injecting stimulants and dependence on G, requiring medically supervised detoxification. A report by the National Treatment Agency in 2013 indicated that 'club drugs' accounted for just 2% of all people in treatment; in Antidote they account for almost all of our clients' drug use.

In working with gay and bisexual men in particular we have also seen a sharp change in the patterns of using, with 'chemsex' - sexualised drug use – and sexual risk taking – extremely common. We have had to adapt our services to jointly tackle HIV, other sexual and substance risk together to ensure the relationship between drug use and sexual risk can be fully explored and dealt with. Single-gender services may be necessary to enable men to discuss their behaviour frankly and openly.

What needs to be done to be LGBT- and chemsex-competent?

Services need to ensure that LGBT people know their services are accessible by them, and that they will be welcomed, their issues understood and their needs met. They need to know that practitioners will be experienced in working with the drugs they are more commonly using, and that they will be aware of the LGBT cultural factors that may be associated with their using. Staff need to feel confident in discussing drug and alcohol use connected with sexual behaviours and cultural contexts they may be less familiar with, as well as competent in addressing emerging need with less familiar drugs and NPS. Services need to ensure they meet requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duties. Commissioners need to understand local need and ensure the services they procure can demonstrate how they achieve outcomes for LGBT clients.

London Friend's report **Out Of Your Mind** outlines practical steps commissioners, providers, and front-line staff can take to improve their own LGBT competence.

www.londonfriend.org.uk/outofyourmind

Suggested elements that can be provided by London Friend:

- LGBT input into tender applications
- Identification of outcome measurements and KPIs for LGBT people
- Input into LGBT content of publicity/website etc.
- Development of LGBT group programme
- Development of men's group programme
- Development of women's group programme
- Development of trans group programme
- Development and delivery of chemsex interventions
- Delivery of group programmes
- Delivery of one-to-one support
- LGBT capacity building for main provider/partners
- LGBT training for providers of generic group programmes
- Supervision of staff (LGBT specific)

Partnership costs

Costs can be negotiated on an individual basis dependent on volume and the size of the generic contract, and would incur a management charge, which includes the support & supervision of staff and any volunteers assisting to deliver the project.

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