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## 1. What is the purpose of these briefing papers?

This briefing paper is the second in a series. The first paper is now available online – [Briefing paper 1: Motivational Interviewing](#). Each paper focuses on an individual topic such as an intervention type or a specific target group of clients. The briefing papers will provide:

- a short overview of the topic, produced with input from an expert
- links to the best evidence-based research and findings from the [Skills Hub](#), the [Drug and Alcohol Research Matrices](#) and elsewhere
- a wider resources section which contains less formal materials such as toolkits, articles and videos.

These briefings will be useful for any practitioner working in drug or alcohol treatment. Some will also contain resources which will be useful for service-managers.

## 2. What are the issues around gay men, drugs and sex?

This introduction has kindly been produced by Monty Moncrieff, Chief Executive at [London Friend](#), with input from David Stuart, Training, Outreach and Development at London Friend's drug and alcohol project [Antidote](#) and the Skills Consortium.

Although most drug services have usually focussed heavily on heroin and crack cocaine, there have been recent pronounced trends in patterns of drug use that are gradually changing this focus, especially for services working with LGBT clients.

The NTA report [Club Drugs: Emerging Trends and Risks](#) (pdf) found a rise in the use of club drugs including mephedrone, GBL/GHB and methamphetamine. Within mainstream services these substances remain a marginal part of their work, but reports from targeted services like Antidote, which supports exclusively LGBT men and women, suggest that GHB/GBL and methamphetamine now account for almost all of their work. Wider official figures show a gradual increase in these two substances, along with the rapid rise of mephedrone use, but within the LGBT population this increase has been enormously steep and almost exclusively linked to sexual use by gay and bisexual men. These drugs have changed the way some gay and bisexual men socialise, keeping them in clubs for longer, and increasingly moving into private parties and sourcing sexual partners via online dating sites and smart phone apps specifically to use drugs with.

Men accessing Antidote – a space they consider safe, confidential, and, crucially, aware of their lifestyles – report how their drug use has changed and about the sometimes risky behaviour that occurs whilst they're using. Many men report that these drugs have a strong, sexually stimulating effect and that having sex with five or more partners in a weekend is common. Some specifically look for 'bareback' sex (without condoms).

Some who are already HIV positive report non-adherence to their medication whilst using. Increasingly clients report that they're injecting (or 'slamming') their drugs; shooting up crystal and mephedrone is becoming the norm for some. An increase in injecting club drugs is also clearly demonstrated in the NTA report.

Patterns of use are changing - clients have presented with changing need around G (the joint name covering both GBL and GHB), now experiencing daily, dependent use. Vastly improved knowledge about how to dose effectively has led to clubbers initiating a pattern of regularity into their using; once the weekend has stopped a slightly higher-than-clubbing dose helps them sleep and the following morning a slightly lower dose keeps taking the edge off. For those that become dependent this is a new and scary situation. Until now gay men have never fully embraced a drug that can require a difficult medically-supervised detox.

**It's not over playing it to say these drugs have totally changed the game for some of these men. So what can be done to help?**

Services can work with clients on: how to achieve sexual intimacy without drugs; thinking about what's on their Gaydar profile and what they say they're looking for; and how to set sexual boundaries in connection with managing their drug use.

For G users too treatment has changed and a new treatment pathway for detoxes has been forged through work with providers and commissioners. Antidote has worked with the [Club Drug Clinic \(CDC\)](#) based at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, where clients can access a one-stop shop service of medical interventions and psycho-social support from a team that is competent at 'gay-friendly' support. Although this Antidote/CDC Partnership is a service open to all, 80% of its clients are LGBT – a group often cited as 'hard to reach'.

Although the emergence of a new generation of drugs and their risky use by gay and bi men is a real challenge for practitioners and service managers, there has been some encouraging signs of dedicated work and innovative practice in the drug and alcohol sector, as well as coverage in the wider media.

### 3. What is the evidence on behaviour and treatment?

There is not a lot of research specifically on this topic. The selection below is taken from a variety of sources and covers both the broader issues around drugs and LGBT communities, as well as how specifically new trends of club drug consumption are affecting the health of gay men.

1. [Drugs and Diversity: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender \(LGBT\) communities](#) (pdf)  
– UK Drug Policy Commission

This UKDPC report surveys the evidence on how LGBT people use, and are affected by, drugs. It provides a useful broad overview of barriers to engagement and ramifications for policy and practice.

2. [High-risk drug practices tighten grip on London gay scene](#) – The Lancet

This article gives a good overview of recent trends from a medical perspective. It details the types of substances used, how rates of injecting for mephedrone and crystal meth are rising, as well as HIV diagnoses, and how specialist LGBT services are meeting the need.

3. [Sexualised drug use by MSM: background, current status and response](#) (pdf) – David Stuart

This paper was written for the HIV Nursing journal by David. It thoroughly covers how changing trends in intravenous drug use and risky sexual behaviour in some of London's LGBT communities has led to worrying health outcomes, and new challenges for the workforce.

4. [Club Drugs: Emerging Trends and Risks](#) (pdf) – National Treatment Agency

This NTA report provides invaluable data on the patterns of consumption of club drugs including mephedrone, ketamine, GBL/GHB and crystal meth. There is no information on the sexual orientation of users but there is data on age.

5. [Reducing sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol for patients in substance abuse treatment](#) - Calsyn D.A., Crits-Christoph P., Hatch-Maillette M.A. et al. (Drug and Alcohol Findings)

This study looks at how successful the Real Men Are Safe (REMAS) intervention was at reducing the rate of unprotected sex men were having under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Instead of using a single educational session on HIV the model used five sessions including motivational intervention and skills sessions. Although some difference was found at the three month follow up points none was found at six months.

#### 4. Which wider resources can help me?

1. [The Meth-Fuelled, Week-Long Orgies Ravaging London's Gay Sex Party Scene](#) – Vice magazine

This article in Vice magazine explains and explores some of the parties that currently take place in London where risky drug use and sex takes place. It includes the words and experiences of people from the scene.

2. [The Rise and Rise of Club Drugs](#) – Dr Owen Bowden Jones

In this YouTube video Skills Consortium Executive member Dr Owen Bowden Jones explains and discusses the continued rise in popularity in club drugs such as mephedrone, GBL/GHB and others, and the challenges for the workforce in adapting to new patterns and methods of consumption.

3. [Code Clinic](#)

Code Clinic is a sexual health clinic for gay men in the harder end of the sex scene. It runs in London every Tuesday 5pm – 7pm and can offer advice on drugs, sex and keeping safe in a non-judgemental atmosphere. You can watch Code's [promotion video online](#).

4. [Gay men, sex and drugs resources](#) – Antidote

This Antidote webpage provides background reading on risky sex and drug use, and provides forms which can be used by workers to monitor condom use and levels of drug-facilitated 'chem-sex'.

5. [Safer injecting practice](#) – Antidote

This harm reduction information explains safer injecting practice for injecting club drugs (slamming).

6. [Every drop counts – GHB/GBL dosage video](#) – Dr Adam Winstock + Dr John Ramsey

This YouTube features Dr John Ramsey of [TICTAC](#) talking about harm reduction measures GHB/GBL users are themselves taking to minimise the risk of overdose through more regular and controlled dosage.

7. [Wasted: gay men, drugs and alcohol](#) (pdf) – GMFA

This document produced by the GMFA (the gay men's health charity) gives a broad overview of issues and staying safe around alcohol and drugs for gay men.