

CONCLUSIONS OF THE SEMINAR:

**“The leisure
industry, a
necessary agent in
the prevention of
chemsex-
associated risks”**

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Introduction

The Subdirectorate-General for Substance Abuse, HIV, STIs and Viral Hepatitis, in accordance with the baseline of the public policies document **CHEMSEX: prevention, screening and approach in Catalonia**, is rolling a pack measures to improve its approach in the face of chemsex.

In this context, collaboration between the public administrations, communities of LGTBI+ persons and the LGTBI+ leisure industry is capital for the effectiveness of prevention and care addressed to chemsex users. Because of that, structural measures are needed that allow for interventions and resources of harm reduction to exist in locations and LGTBI+ leisure venues where chemsex practices take place. These persons' health preservation is paramount.

This seminar does not only reflect on the commitment to our sympathetic stand and the necessary talking of this complex reality, but also illustrates the crux of alliances and cooperation, with an integral approach, for the prevention of risks associated with chemsex.

Methodology of the seminar

The seminar was designed as a collaborative and interdisciplinary event to address the relation between the LGTBI+ leisure industry and prevention from chemsex practices. Because of the complexity of this multifaceted reality and the importance of collaboration between the several agents involved, an integral approach was preferred.

Participants were selected guaranteeing an equitable representation of the public administration, the community organizations representing the LGTBI+ communities, and private companies belonging in the leisure industry. Agents were contacted provided they had relevant experience in addressing chemsex and were committed to the said topic. Likewise, we made a point of guaranteeing a diversity of perspectives to enrich the dialogue and the analysis of the situation and available evidence.

Among guests in the seminar were professionals with various profiles, including government representatives in matters of health, addictions, gender and LGTBI+

communities, analogous representatives of the Barcelona Public Health Agency, LGTBI+ community entities, chemsex users, and representatives of the LGTBI+ leisure industry, including saunas, parties and festivals.

The seminar developed for two days in the month of June 2023, with a duration of two hours per session. The first session included a first approach to the situation. An analysis of available data was shared and reflections and discussions ensued. However, the second session shifted to offer proposals to intervene consequently on this reality, while identifying aspects that the group considered were of first need.

A total of 15 representatives participated in the 2 sessions, belonging to the public administration, the community organizations of the LGTBI+ collective, and the LGTBI+ leisure industry (festivals, party rooms, sex clubs and saunas).

Objectives searched were:

- Generate a space specific to technical reflection and dialogue about the role of the gay leisure industry in the prevention associated to chemsex practices, counting with community and institutional agents also as key elements.
- Establish a majority reference frame providing definitions and available evidence about the magnitude of the situation, the legal implications and the role of cultural aspects.
- Generate a discussion that may allow to advance in the diagnosis of the situation.
- Promote the compilation of proposals and measures of use for the different agents implied.
- Facilitate the discussion about these proposals with a view to attain a consensus about necessary steps, priority measures, responsibility, and a work calendar.

Key aspects identified during the seminar

Next comes a synthesis of the ideas and reflections shared during the two sessions of the seminar.

1. It was convened the need to improve coordination between the different agents in the field, holding regular meetings between public health, community organizations and employers and employees at companies in the gay leisure industry.
2. Even though leisure premises are conceived as safe spaces where situations of risk from chemsex practices may turn up, the concern for the odd intoxication is common while still safeguarding the public's general health. Some success experiences in Catalonia are the availability of medical emergency teams at large leisure events, like festivals. Training for health professionals is deemed an opportunity.
3. There is concern for the use of substances among the public who attends parties, festivals or saunas.
4. Another facet generating concern is that persons with chemsex practices may suffer stigmatization because of drug use.
5. Private homes are the priority venues for chemsex. LGTBI+ leisure premises are thought to be where first contacts between persons who practice chemsex occur, so that, after partying they meet privately out of all regulation.
6. Attention was drawn to the need to facilitate specific training on health, risk reduction and STIs prevention for professionals working in the leisure sector. Also, to the need of adapting training to:
 - different languages, working timetables and formats;
 - high level of rotation of professionals in leisure businesses, which makes training difficult.
7. The physical and online spaces the leisure sector provides are an opportunity to facilitate preventive information about chemsex, as well as about available professional services for those who practice it.

8. Among the concerns of the industry representatives were: the public's personal security, the prevention of medical emergency situations, the prevention of drug use, the attainment of safe business spaces, the venues' reputation, the brand image, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, and the compliance of the law.

Conclusions and proposals

About the need to improve coordination between the different agents working in the field:

- Promote regular coordination meetings between community organizations, public health, companies in the gay leisure industry, and security corps.
- Enhance collaboration between the public administration and the gay leisure sector like pubs, sex clubs, discotheques and festivals, encouraging adhesion to protocols against sexual assault. In this respect, the public administrations must give support to the organizing companies, who probably lack expertise in the prevention and addressing of sexual assault.

About the need to facilitate specific training on health, risk reduction and STIs prevention for professionals working in the leisure sector (saunas, sex clubs, discotheques, festivals, hotels, etc.):

- Translate the chemsex training addressed to professionals of the leisure industry into the Spanish language.
- Include the chemsex training in the professional training plans of the company.
- Adapt the training to the high rotation of professionals in the leisure industry, offering them flexible training options, face-to-face format (in the workplace, at headquarters LGTBI+ friendly, etc.), periods of study with no time deadline, blended training combining online and face-to-face formats...

About the opportunity to facilitate awareness and preventive information about chemsex through physical and online channels at the LGTBI+ leisure premises:

- Include a specific section and/or links to risk reduction info on web pages of festivals, discotheques, saunas and sex clubs.

- Plan activities of prevention, in collaboration with educators, peer-to-peer and community organizations, having in mind the annual calendar of festivals, great events and holidays, and identify on which dates, days of the week and times of day there can occur more medical crises, either mental or overdoses, that may require the intervention of emergency services.
- Disseminate preventive campaigns on digital screens, posters and/or brochures, in graphic or audio-visual format, with QR codes or otherwise, at festivals and busy leisure venues like discotheques, sex clubs and saunas.
- Design preventive and risk reduction campaigns, and disseminate information of points of care by the very leisure companies through their own publications and newsletters.
- Promote the circulation of information about risk reduction at leisure venues, including information about substance analysis services.

About the concern for the public's personal security at great events, festivals, and leisure premises and venues:

- Incorporate procedures to improve the security of the public: rounds of surveillance in maximum risk zones (especially for saunas and sex clubs) with suitable regularity and frequency to ensure non-stop security of those in attendance.
- Limit the time of stay on the premises to 6 - 8 hrs, and if attendees wish to stay on, make a re-entry mandatory (especially for saunas and sex clubs).

Establish a maximum hrs of stay per day (especially for saunas and sex clubs).

- Reinforce cleaning and maintenance of spaces, especially during peak attendance times, to guarantee safety and hygiene.
- Regulate the maximum temperature and guarantee an adequate ventilation of the premises (especially for saunas and sex clubs).
- Design response protocols to help persons in need of support, and draw the prevention approach in case of emergency situations, intoxications and/or sexual violence, as well as the line of connection with the specialized services of the drop-in care network.
- Establish common quality criteria for LGTBI+ leisure venues.

- Give immediate attention and advice to the victims of sexual assault (especially if assault has taken place in the facilities of the business), offering information about the protocols and available services to attend in these situations, and refer to the corresponding public services.
- Collaborate with awareness-raising activities about sexual consent, thus contributing to improve the capacity to detect sexual assault, as much on the part of the victim as on the offender and on any possible bystander.

This seminar has established the bases for an integral and collaborative focus for the advance of prevention associated to chemsex. It is conceived as a starting point for future measures and initiatives in the field, which represents a significant step. Some of the proposed measures will require continued close collaboration to take the implementation down-to-earth.

The future lines of action need to focus on the coordination between agents, training, awareness, specific measures implementation and a continued dialogue to approach this complex reality. They also must include the promotion of prevention and health among the LGBTBI+ community.

Participants

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Secretariat General, Ministry of Health

Substance Abuse Care and Prevention, Barcelona Public Health Agency

Epidemiology Service, Barcelona Public Health Agency

BCN Checkpoint

Energy Control - ABD

Gais Positius

Stop Sida

Matinée Group

Locamente

Saunas Group Pases

