

Press Release

For Immediate Circulation

Review into LGBT drug use in London says more must be done

At the end of a month where another three gay men's deaths have been directly linked to drug and alcohol misuses, the Metropolitan Police Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group has published its review of drug and alcohol use amongst London's LGBT community.

The review was undertaken by Advisory Group members without funding and is an independent perspective to build a picture of the challenge facing London and the opportunities for the Metropolitan Police and their partners to make a real difference. However the Met were supportive of the review and worked with the lead advisor, Dr Justin Varney, to ensure full cooperation and participation.

Simon Bray, South Link Commander, ACPO lead Methamphetamine and Precursors Working Group said about the review *"In the lead-up to this study ACPO was aware of the reputation of methamphetamine (crystal meth) as a drug of choice in the LGBT communities. The work of the Advisory Group has allowed us to gain a better understanding of methamphetamine and wider drug use which will assist future work in this important area."*

The review was started in August 2007 following concerns that more LGBT people in the capital were dying as a result of drug and alcohol misuse than from homophobic violence.

The review used a series of paper based and online questionnaires as well as face-to-face interviews with key stakeholders. Over 170 community members took part in the online survey, giving confidential perspectives and views on their own drug and alcohol use and that of their friends and partners.

Bob Hodgson, Co-Chair of the LGBT AG, said *"In the last couple of years over ten deaths in London have been linked to drug overdose or alcohol misuse in the LGBT community, we cannot just continue to think one size fits all for drug and alcohol response, it is time that the specific needs of the LGBT community are addressed"*

Although recognising its limitation, the review found that patterns of drug and alcohol use amongst lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender individuals in London was different from those seen in national population based studies, and hence there was a distinct need for a different approach in tackling the challenge of drugs and alcohol misuse in this community.

The review found that:

- Drug and alcohol misuse reflected other LGBT studies, in being higher amongst gay men than the general population
- There was a general lack of awareness of any LGBT targeted or accessible support services.
- Most respondents who used drugs did so at home and purchased them at home.

The review therefore made a range of key recommendations including the Metropolitan Police raising the profile of LGBT targeted and accessible support services, raising the profile of LGBT liaison officers, working with partners such as NHS London and the London Ambulance services to tackle overdose in club settings and developing a regional strategy targeting drug and alcohol misuse amongst the LGBT community.

Dr Justin Varney, author of the report, said *'This is small snapshot of the challenge facing London. The Met and their strategic partners need to grasp the challenge and do something strategic and targeted, crystal is an issue but so is cocaine, ecstasy and alcohol and the brutal truth is that these deaths could be prevented.'*

Further information

For further information or discuss this press release please contact Dr Justin Varney, LGBT Advisory Group Member, via email at justinvarney@btinternet.com or on 07939 578 854

The full report can be downloaded from the LGBT AG website at www.lgbtag.org.uk

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group (LGBT AG) is a voluntary group of independent LGBT advisors to the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). We advise on and monitor police issues that affect our community across all the London boroughs.

The full recommendations from the report are:

1. The Metropolitan Police consider how its current strategic approach to drugs and alcohol misuse in London's LGBT community reflects the distribution and demographics of use.
2. The Metropolitan Police ensure that there are signposting resources available for officers to support the public in accessing LGBT appropriate substance misuse and alcohol support services. For example service promotion cards that could be handed out when cautioning individuals.
3. The Metropolitan Police undertake a regional campaign to raise awareness of LGBT Liaison Officers and their role in the community.
4. The Metropolitan Police work with partners, such as London

Ambulance Service and NHS London; to ensure that club venues are engaged with tackling drug misuse and alcohol abuse.

5. The Metropolitan Police should request NHS London to undertake a systematic review and health needs assessment of London's LGBT communities to ensure that there is a regional network of services appropriate to need and an evidence base available to inform their drug and alcohol work.

6. The Metropolitan Police should work with the National Treatment Agency to undertake a full equity audit of services to better understand the barriers to services and support experienced by LGBT individuals and systematically map accessible services in London to promote to the public.

7. The Metropolitan Police lobby regional partners through the GLA partnership to ensure that London's LGBT communities needs are specifically addressed in regional drug and alcohol strategies.