

Many gay and bisexual men are using substances – we know this.

Now We Need to Think About How and Why.

The link between substance use, especially crystal, and the risk for HIV infection among gay and bisexual men is well-established. HIV transmission can occur through the use of shared needles and other drug use paraphernalia, and substance use can alter decisions to have safer sex.

A lot of substance use occurs during activities, such as dancing on ecstasy at clubs or smoking marijuana with friends, which connect gay or bisexual men to their community and their world. Many of us encounter substances as part of the coming out process, as we enter the gay community and are introduced to circuit parties or sex venues where substance use may be common. Many of us use substances as a relief from emotional pain associated with stress, homophobia, racism, loneliness, and/or HIV/AIDS. Still others use substances to heighten the pleasures of sex, or as part of a sexual exchange: we exchange our bodies for drugs, or trade our drugs for bodies.

There isn't one way to use substances, just as there isn't one way to prevent substance abuse. The dialogue with gay and bisexual men about substance use, and the interventions to curb abuse, cannot focus on simply stopping it.

Prevention programs must encourage honest explorations of the reasons behind our use of substances, the risks and danger involved, and the loss of control over our lives that can occur.

Our goals should be to help each other regulate our use, to prevent patterns of abuse, and to reduce the potentially harmful consequences that the abuse of substances can cause to our health and our community.

Four Things We Can Do to Make a Difference: A Community Call to Action

- 1) TREAT THE PROBLEM**
Increase in the number of substance abuse treatment and social service programs for gay and bisexual men.
- 2) MAKE THE PROBLEM VISIBLE**
Magnify the visibility of substance abuse and HIV prevention messages by expanding social marketing that reaches gay and bisexual men in the communities where we live, work and play. Expand efforts to bring HIV prevention into bathhouses, sex clubs, circuit parties, private parties, gyms and internet chat rooms.
- 3) INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY**
Work with the community to solve a community problem. Develop and support substance abuse and HIV prevention interventions for gay and bisexual men that involve their sex partners, their boyfriends and ex-boyfriends, their biological and chosen families, their friends, roommates, co-workers, and AA/NA sponsors.
- 4) LISTEN TO RESEARCH**
Support and increase a broad range of research with and for gay and bisexual men who are abusing crystal.