



## Party drug use within gay community networks in an online cohort of gay and bisexual men: baseline findings from the Flux study

Never Stand Still

Arts & Social Sciences

Centre for Social Research in Health

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## Following Lives Undergoing Change (Flux)

### Chief Investigators

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### Associate Investigators

Brent Mackie, Marcus Pastorelli, Colin Batrouney, Nicky Bath

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### Research Officers

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### Institutions

The Kirby Institute, UNSW  
National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW  
Anglia Ruskin University, UK  
Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW

### Community partners

ACON, NSW  
Victorian AIDS Council  
NSW Users' and AIDS Association (NUAA)

### Funding

ARC Discovery Project (DP140102483) (3 years)



## Study aims

Online, longitudinal cohort study of recreational drug use among gay and bisexual men in Australia that aims to:

- Identify contextual and individual factors associated with the uptake and recreational use of drugs among gay and bisexual men (GBM) over time
- Describe the relationship between social and community norms, and the shared understandings of risk and pleasure
- Describe the role of particular gay community subcultures in influencing attitudes and beliefs about drug use

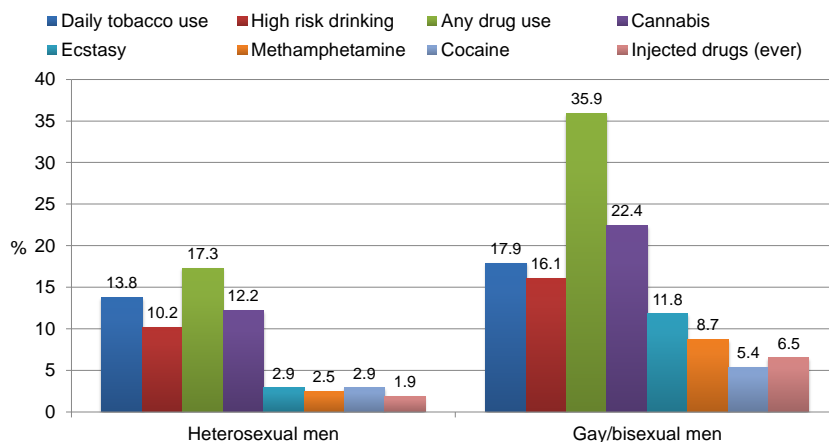


## Aims of this presentation

- Describe Flux methodology
- Report baseline findings on patterns of alcohol and other drug use, and compare with other national datasets
- Examine the extent that participation in different gay community networks is associated with the use of 'party drugs' such as methamphetamine, cocaine, GHB and ketamine



## Sexuality and AOD use among men in National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2013



Roxburgh, Lea, Degenhardt & de Wit, *Int J Drug Policy*, 2016



## Why higher rates of AOD use and harms among GBM?

- Minority stress (Meyer, 2003)
- Historical significance of bar and nightclub cultures
- Community solidarity at dance parties during HIV/AIDS epidemic (Race, 2003)
- Drug use in sexual contexts among gay and bisexual men ('chemsex')
- 'Normalisation' of illicit drug use in gay social networks



## How many gay and bisexual men in Australia?

- Sexual identity - 2% gay, 1% bisexual
- Same-sex sexual attraction – 7%
- Same-sex sexual experience – 7%

~ 250,000 men aged 16-69 years

Source: 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR2)  
(Richters et al 2014)



## Methods

- Prospective, observational cohort study of recreational drug use among GBM
- Automated follow-up every 6 months (up to 5 data points)
- Eligible participants were men who:
  - Gay, bisexual or had sex with a man in previous 12m
  - Lived in Australia
  - Aged at least 16 years
- Enrollment from Sep 2014 – July 2015
- Optional consent for data linkage with state and national health and disease-related registries (eg. National HIV Registry, NDD-HCV, hospital separations)





## Recruitment

21,014 website clicks

2,943 completed consent form

2,705 commenced questionnaire

2,251 provided sufficient baseline data (83%)

1,711 consented to follow-up (76%)

540 consented to baseline only (24%)

1,015 consented to data linkage  
(59%)



# Recruitment



66% via targeted Facebook adverts



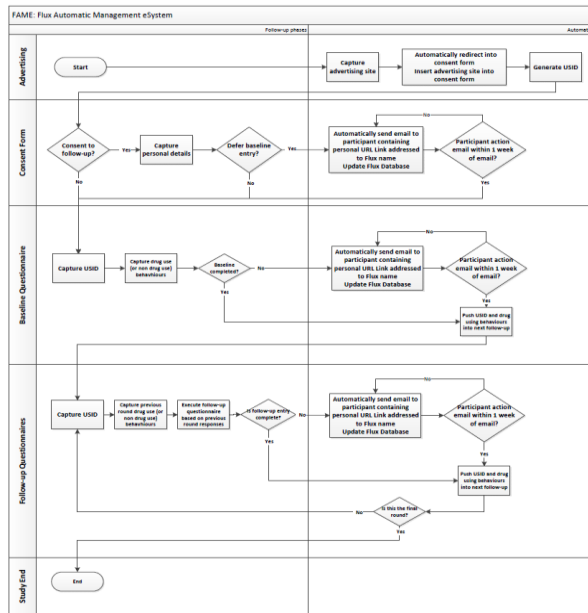
21% via gay dating sites and apps



5% via personal networks



4% via gay community organisations and events

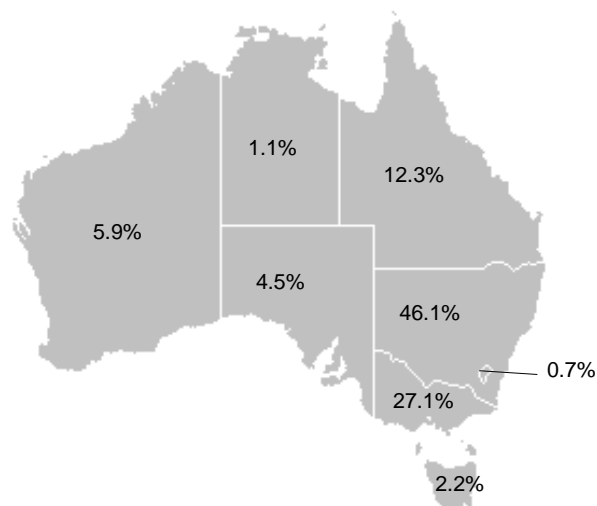


## Sample characteristics

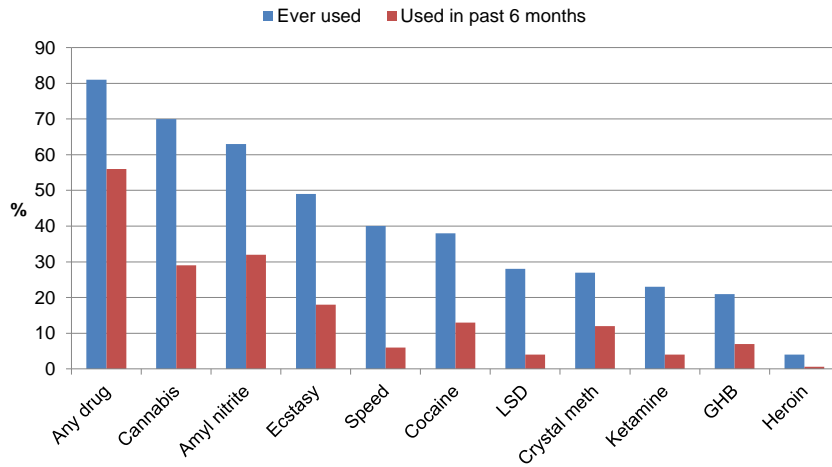
<b>Mean age (SD)</b>	33.0 (12.6)
<b>Gender <i>n</i> (%)</b>	
Male	2234 (99.2%)
Transgender or intersex male	17 (0.8%)
<b>Sexual identity <i>n</i> (%)</b>	
Gay	1990 (88.4%)
Bisexual	199 (8.8%)
Heterosexual / other	62 (2.7%)
<b>HIV status <i>n</i> (%)</b>	
HIV positive	171 (7.6%)
HIV negative	1623 (72.1%)
Untested / unknown	457 (20.6%)
<b>HCV positive <i>n</i> (%)</b>	43 (1.9%)
<b>Anglo-Celtic cultural background <i>n</i> (%)</b>	1620 (72.0%)
<b>Completed university degree <i>n</i> (%)</b>	1180 (52.4%)
<b>Employed full-time <i>n</i> (%)</b>	1217 (54.6%)



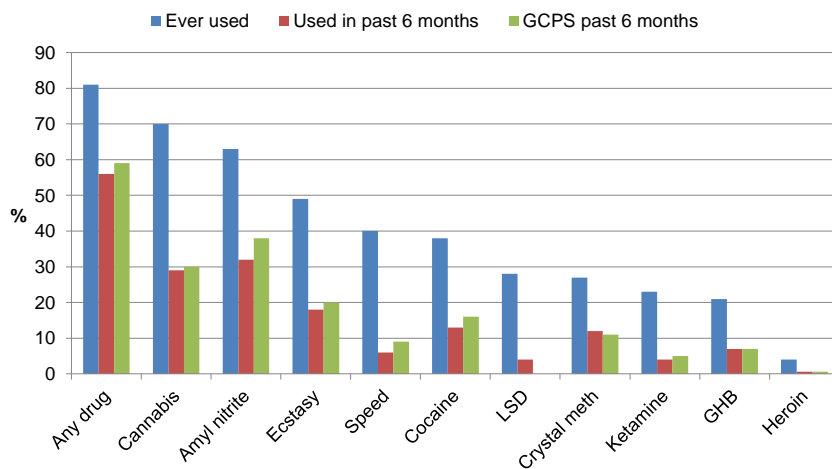
## Geographic distribution of parti



## Lifetime and recent illicit drug use

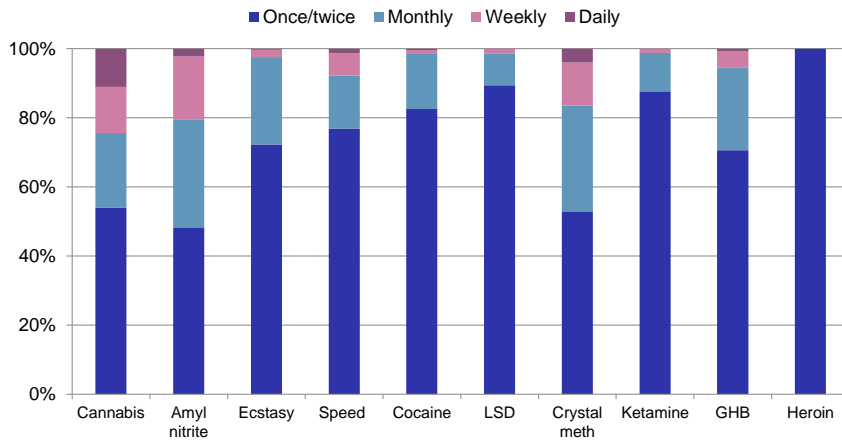


## Lifetime and recent illicit drug use

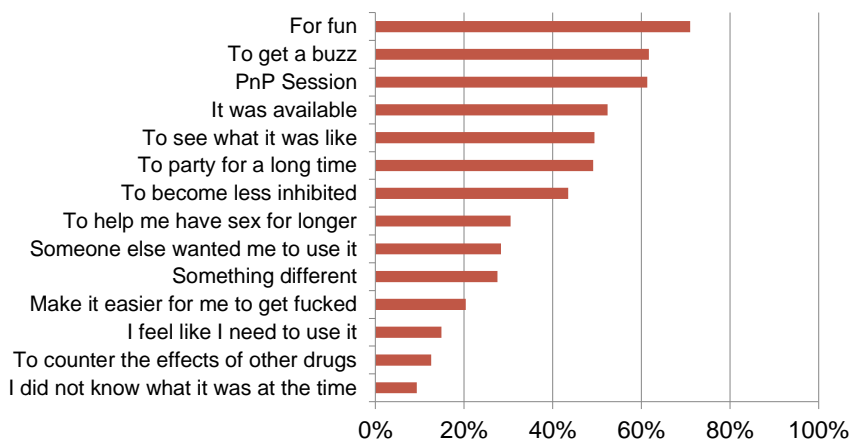




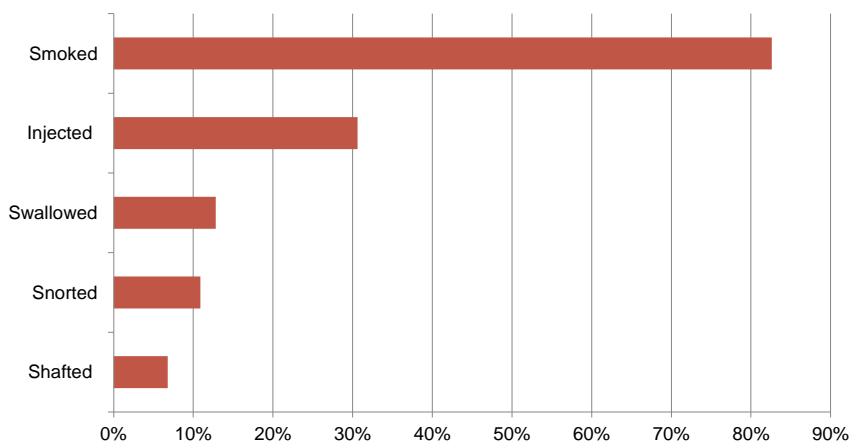
## Frequency of drug use in previous 6 months



## Motivations for crystal meth use



## Routes of crystal meth use



## Injecting drug use

	All (%)	HIV-positive (%)	HIV-negative and untested (%)	P
<b>Ever injected</b>	17.1	50.3	14.4	< .001
<b>Injected in past 6m</b>	4.1	25.2	2.4	< .001

	Ever (%)	Past 6m (%)
<b>Injected:</b>		
Crystal meth	6.5	3.8
Speed	4.9	0.4
Cocaine	2.1	n=5
Heroin	2.0	n=4
Ecstasy	2.0	n=1

- 8 participants reported sharing a needle/syringe in past 6 months (8.6% of past 6m PWID)
- No participants reporting sharing ancillary equipment

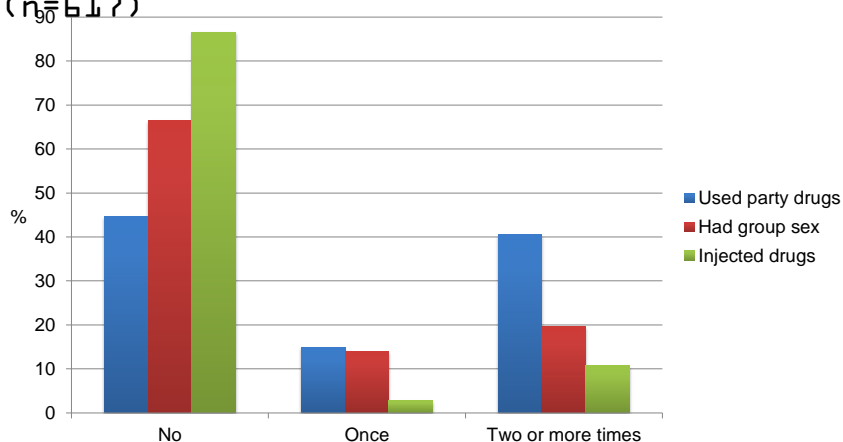


## Gay community networks

	N=2251
<b>Participate in gay club and party scene (%)</b>	
Somewhat	46.3
Very much	8.3
<b>Participate in gay sex clubs and sex parties (%)</b>	
Somewhat	24.0
Very much	3.8
<b>Number of gay friends (median, IQR)</b>	10 (5-20)
<b>Most or all friends are gay men (%)</b>	26.8
<b>A lot of free time spent with gay friends (%)</b>	18.4
<b>Most or all gay friends use illicit drugs (%)</b>	18.8
<b>A lot of time spent with gay friends who use drugs (%)</b>	4.8
<b>Have any friends who inject drugs (%)</b>	14.3



## Drug use in sexual contexts among men who used party drugs in past 6 months (n=617)



## Covariates of recent party drug use

	No party drug use, n=1634 (%)	Party drug use, n=617 (%)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Identify as gay	86.8	92.5	1.81 (1.25-2.63)**
HIV-positive	5.8	12.5	1.62 (1.10-2.40)*
Participate in gay club and party scene	47.9	72.1	2.09 (1.67-2.61)***
Participate in gay sex clubs and sex parties	23.2	40.0	1.50 (1.19-1.90)**
Most or all gay friends use illicit drugs	8.9	45.1	7.01 (5.51-8.91)***

\*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .001



## Summary and conclusions

- Successful enrolled over 1700 into an online cohort study
- First online cohort study of drug use among GBM in Australia
- Unique study method adaptable for other online cohort studies
- Drug experienced sample – similar to national behavioural surveillance surveys of GBM
- Party drug use strongly associated with gay social and sexual networks
- High rates of crystal use, injecting drug use among HIV-positive men – need for targeted harm reduction and treatment services
- Longitudinal data on its way!





## Thank you

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### **The Flux Study**

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