



UNIVERSITY  
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QUEENSLAND



# Queensland Chemsex Study

*Results from a cross-sectional survey of gay and other homosexually active men in Queensland-substance use and sexual activity*

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# List of Terms

- LGBTIQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, Intersex, Queer/Questioning
- Trans\*: Someone who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth, they may identify as transgender, agender, multiple genders or another gender identity. The asterisk was originally added in order to be inclusive, however the term 'trans', is, at times, considered to be more inclusive.
- Cisgender: Someone who does identify with the gender assigned at birth
- Undetectable Viral Load (UVL): When copies of the HIV virus cannot be detected on a standard test, usually <50 copies/mL. This effectively makes transmission impossible.

# How did this study come to be?



- Screening of the documentary “Chemsex”
- Community forum to discuss the film and if and how chemsex occurs in Queensland
- Existing studies into chemsex, explored individual experiences but lacked breadth.
- QuAC wanted more empirical data focused on the Australian population.
- QuAC requested partnership with USQ

# Reasons for gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

- Chemsex is a complex interplay between gay men's drug taking and sexual activity
  - Minority stress effect
  - Gay social and culture associated with venues where alcohol and drugs are available
  - Emergence of geo-location dating apps: sex and drugs easy available using these apps (PNP)
  - Perfect storm: apps, more potent and different drugs (meth, GHB)

# Reasons for gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

(Chemsex Study, 2014, UK)

- Negative feelings of self-worth: internalised homophobia, problems coping with an HIV diagnosis and/or guilt related to having or desiring gay sex (25% meth users HIV positive - Qld Study)
- Issues around body image, (perpetuated by apps). Drugs helped to remove or displace such anxieties when presented with sexual opportunities
- Drugs enhanced confidence by moderating the fear of rejection

# Reasons for gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

- Drugs had the effect of increasing sexual confidence, libido or sexual desire
- Drugs very often facilitated sexual longevity, with multiple partners, men able to have sex for long periods of time without ejaculating
- Chemsex more intense and adventurous than sex without drugs

# Reasons for gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

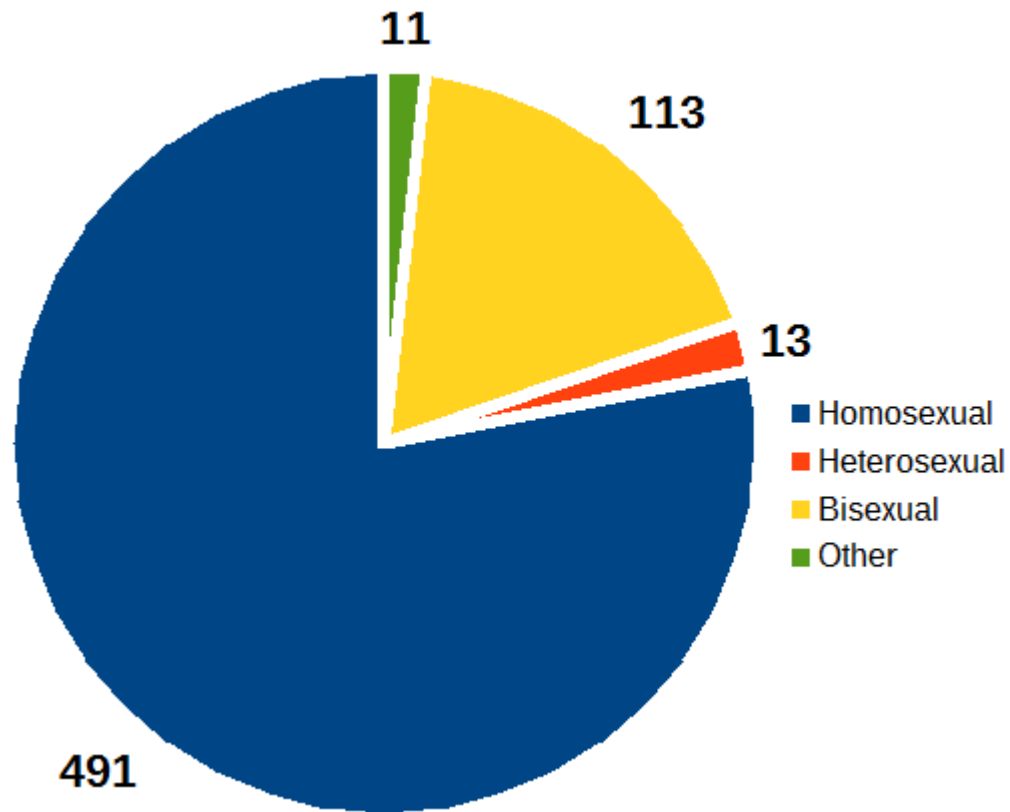
- Drugs able to enhance the sense of connection felt with sexual partner
- This emotional and intimate dimension of chemsex was a significant contributor to dependency, particularly when considering that sex within romantic or intimate relationships is desired by the majority of gay/MSM engaged in chemsex

# About the study

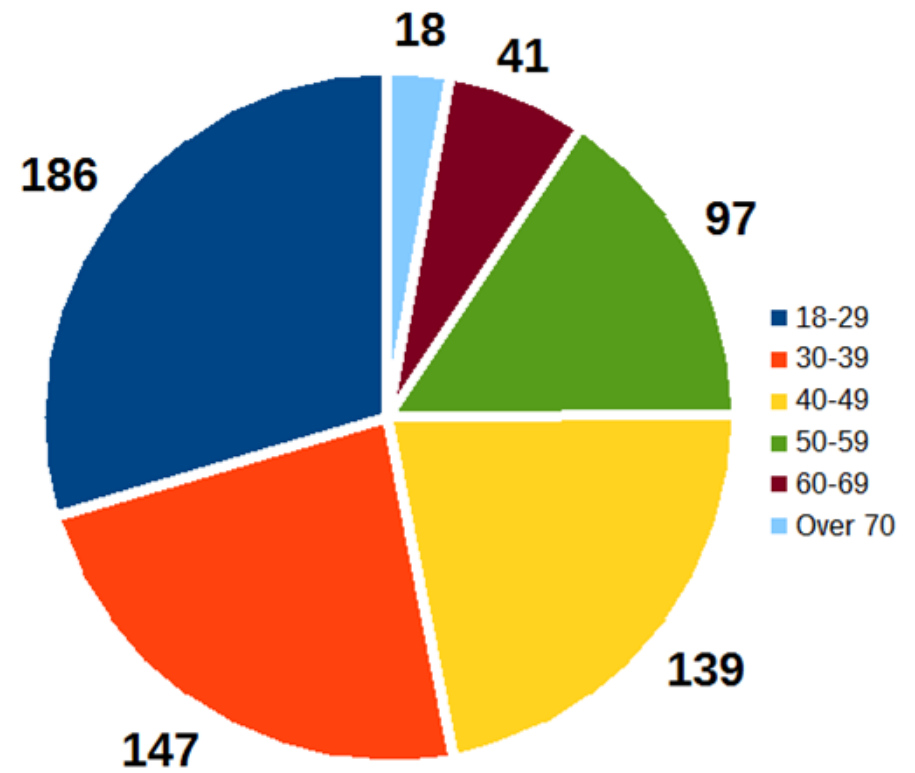
- Data collected over 3 months in 2016
- Data collected online and on paper
- Participants recruited at local LGBTIQ venues and QuAC office within Brisbane
- 628 participants



# Participant Demographics

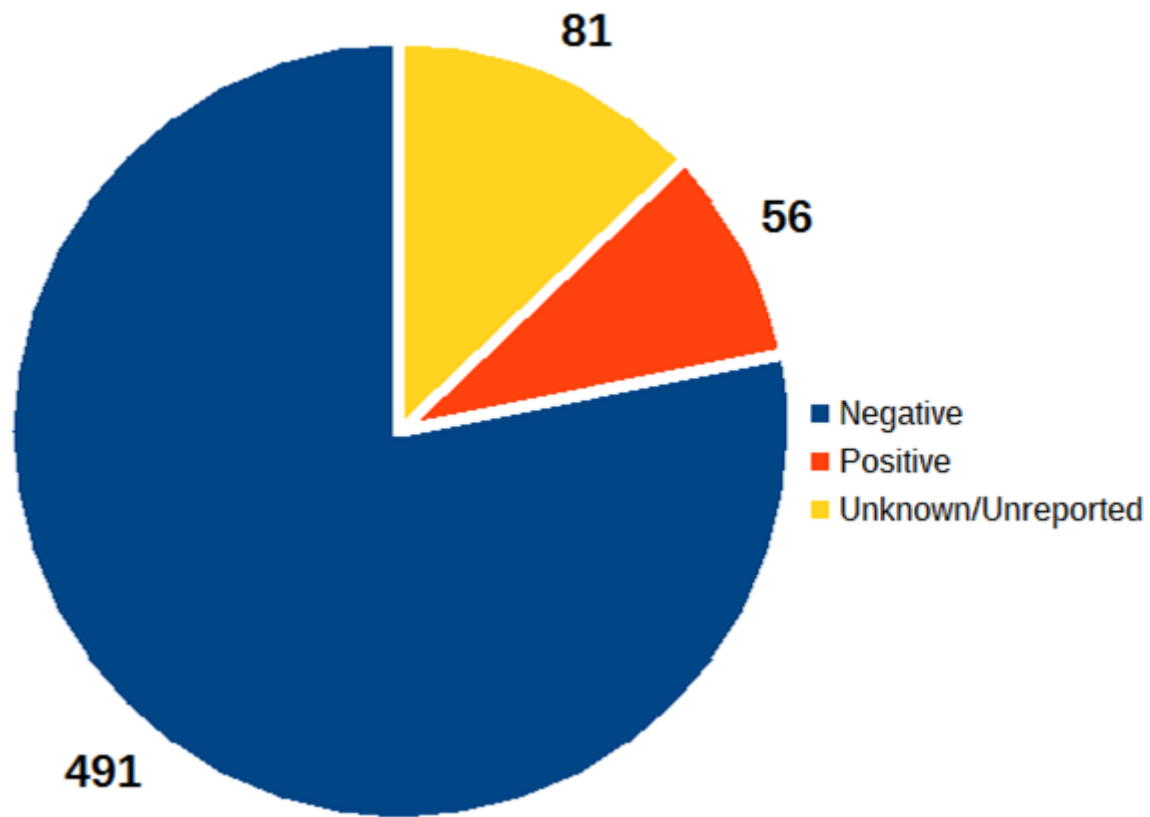


Sexuality

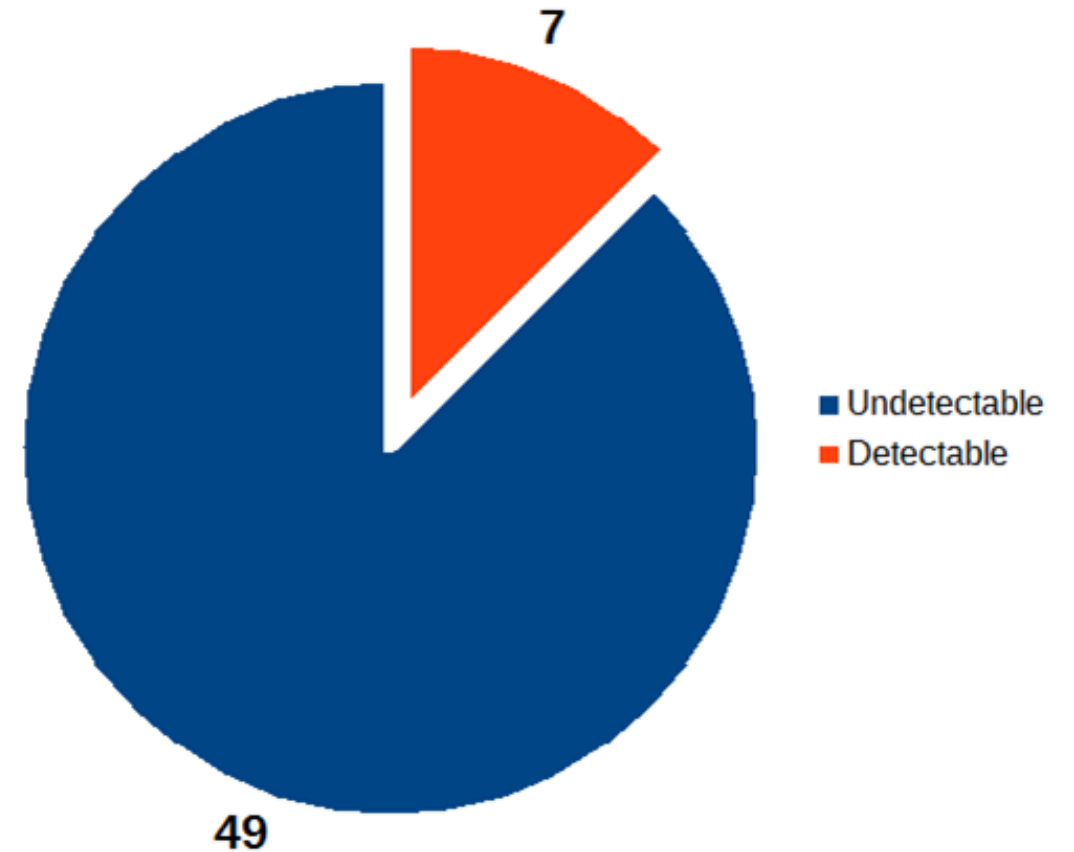


Age

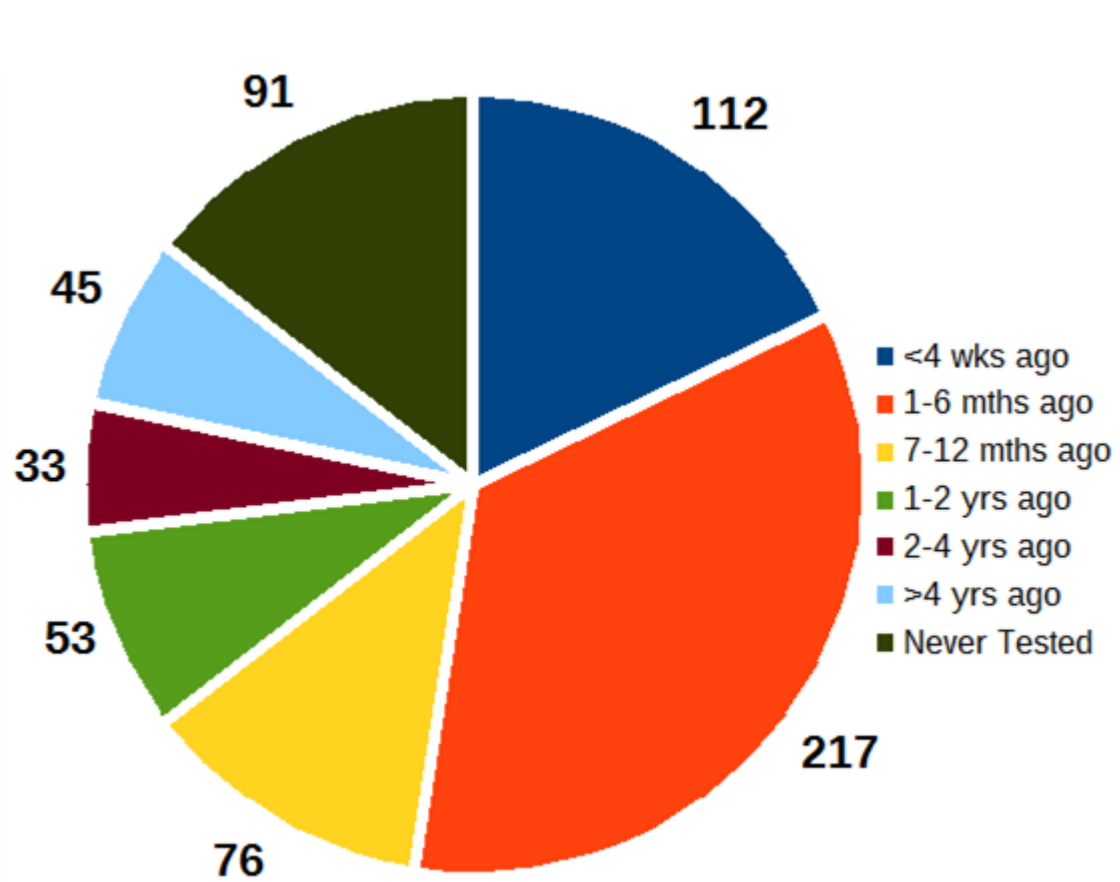
# HIV Status



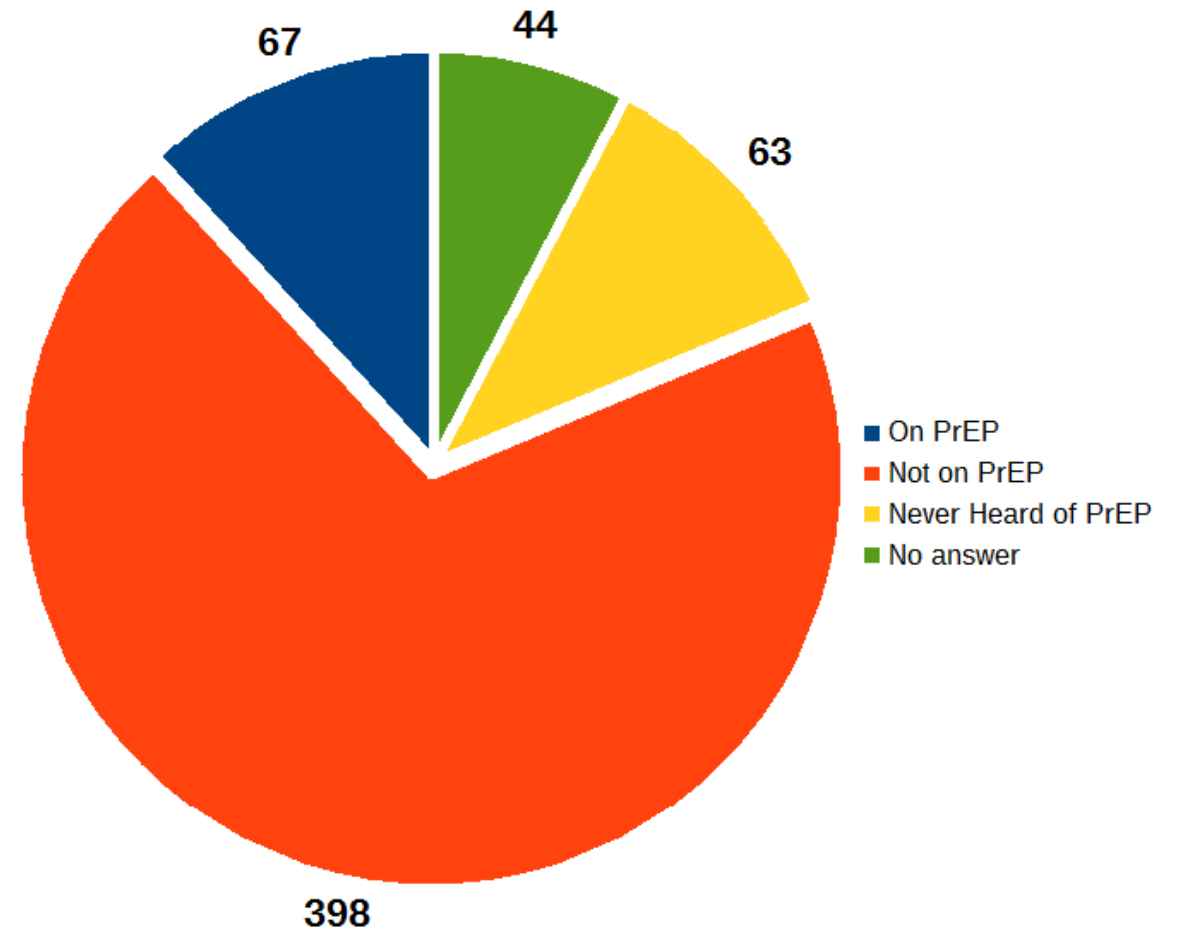
# Viral Load of PLWHIV Participants



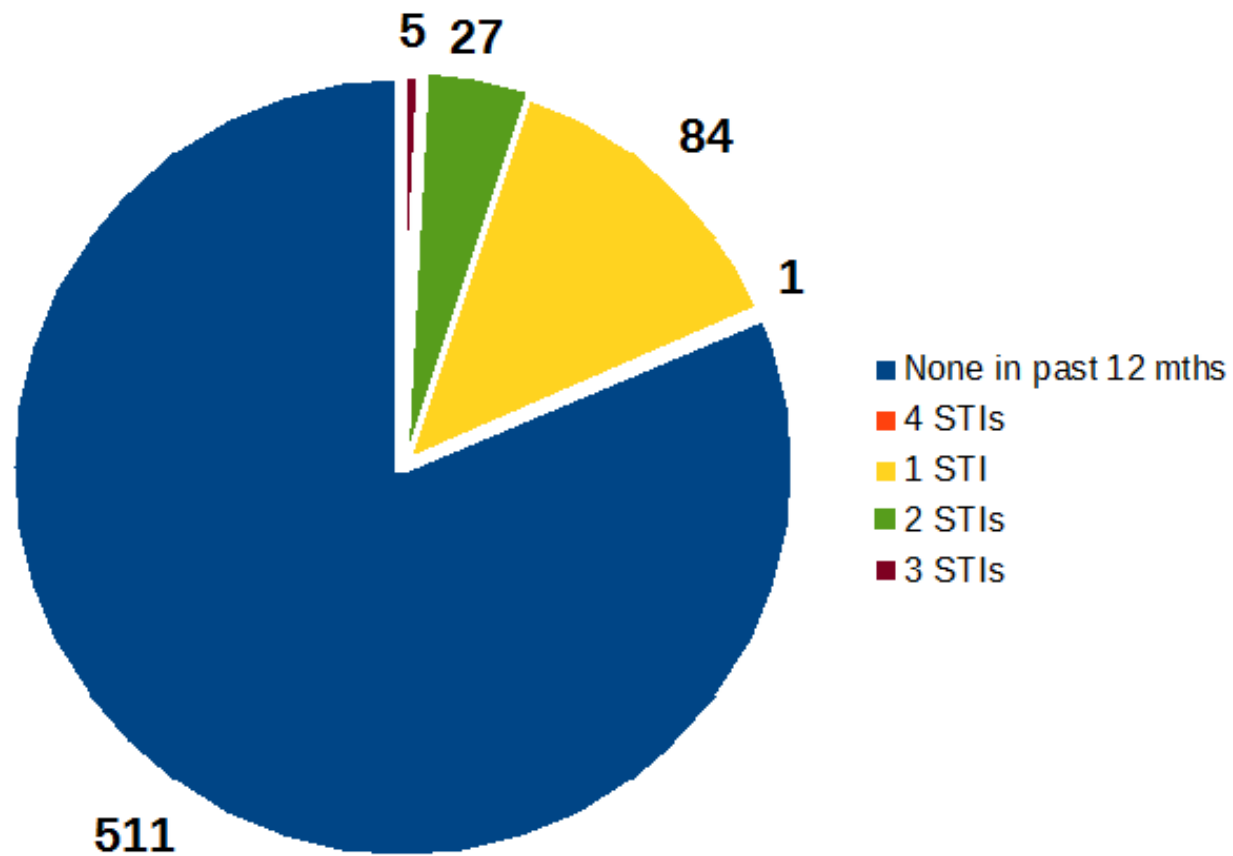
# Last HIV Test



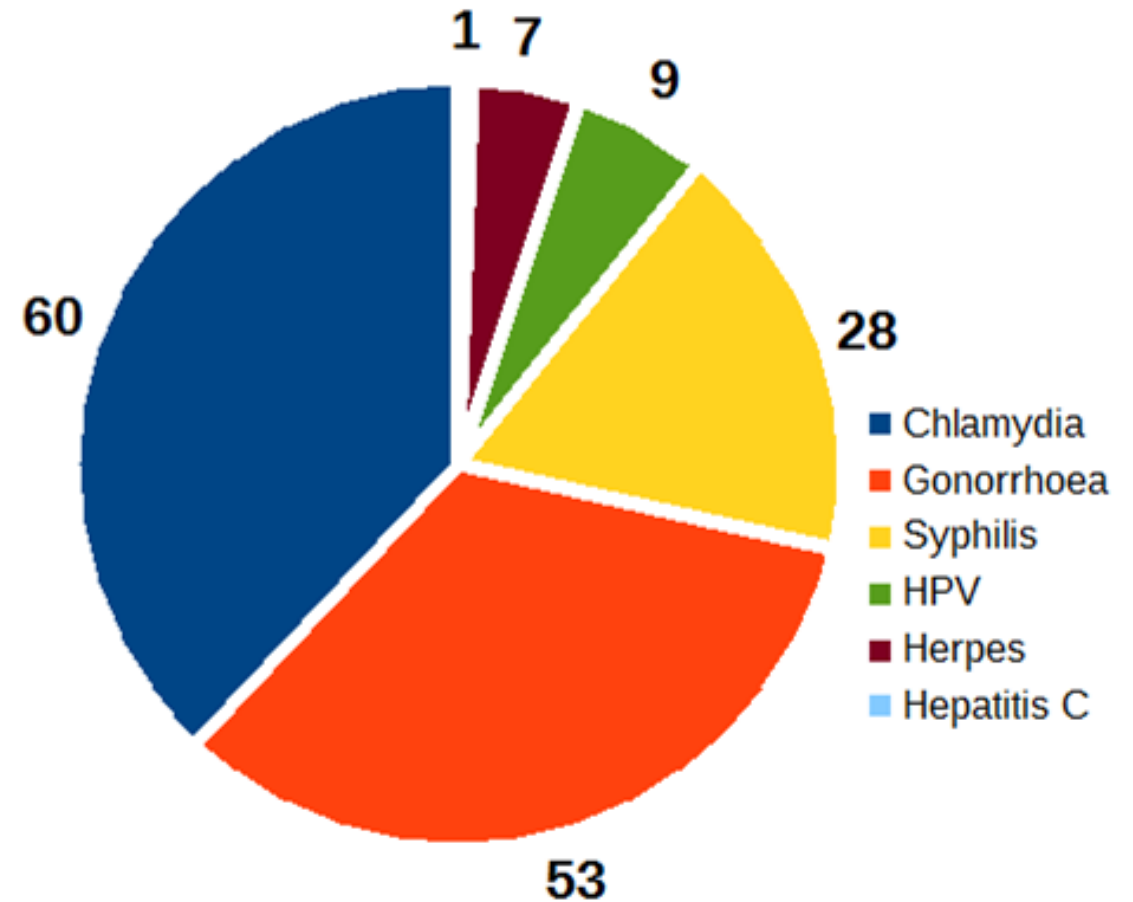
# PrEP Usage



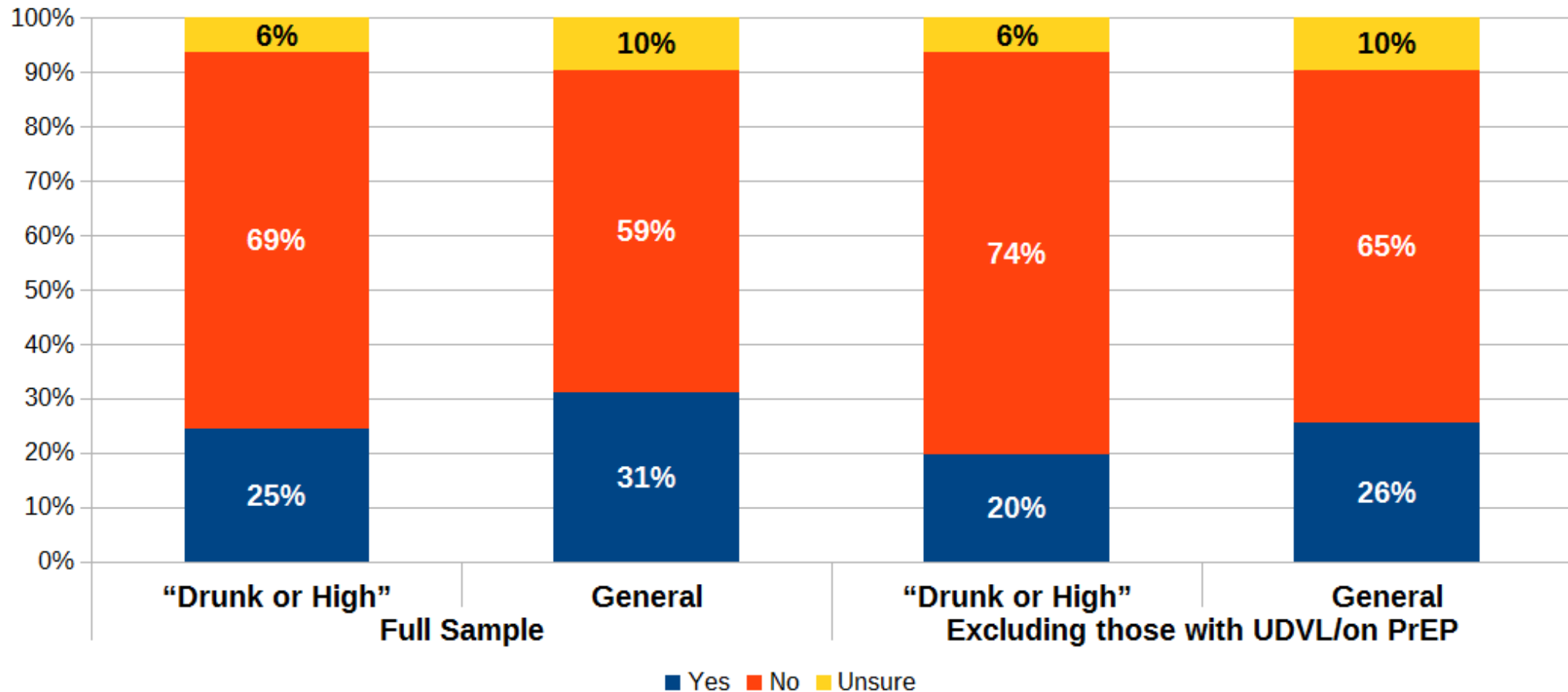
# STI Rate in Participants



# STIs of those participants



# CAI while under the influence with mixed status or unknown status partner

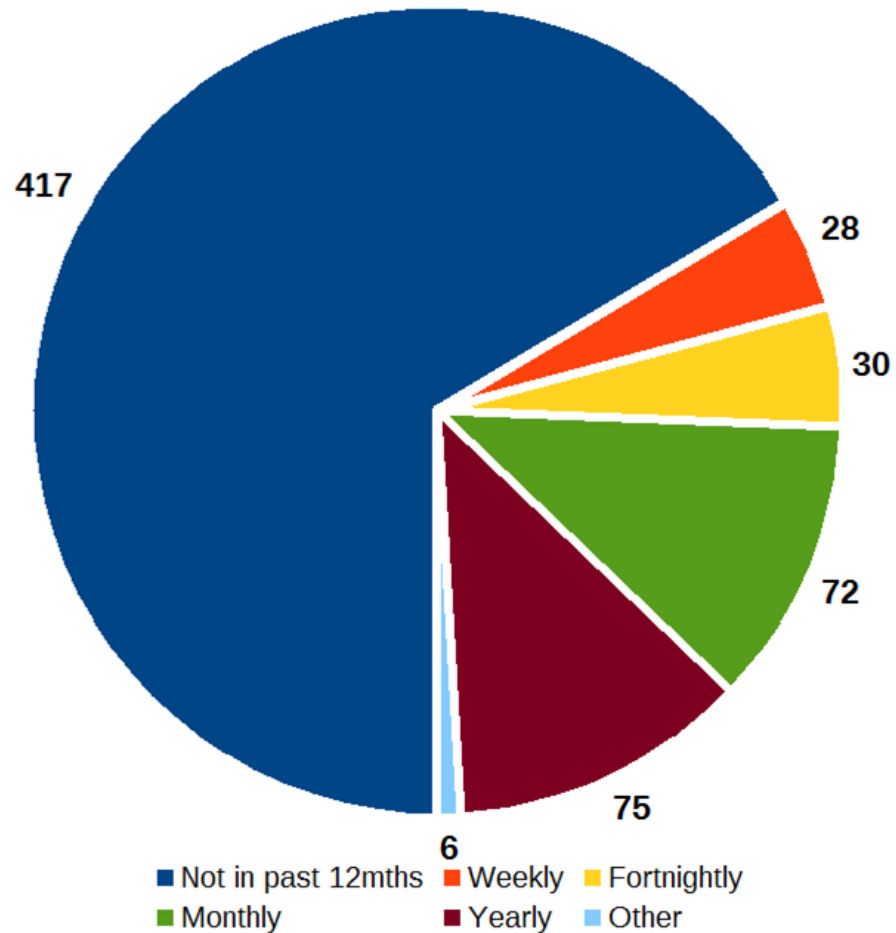


CAI = Condomless Anal Intercourse

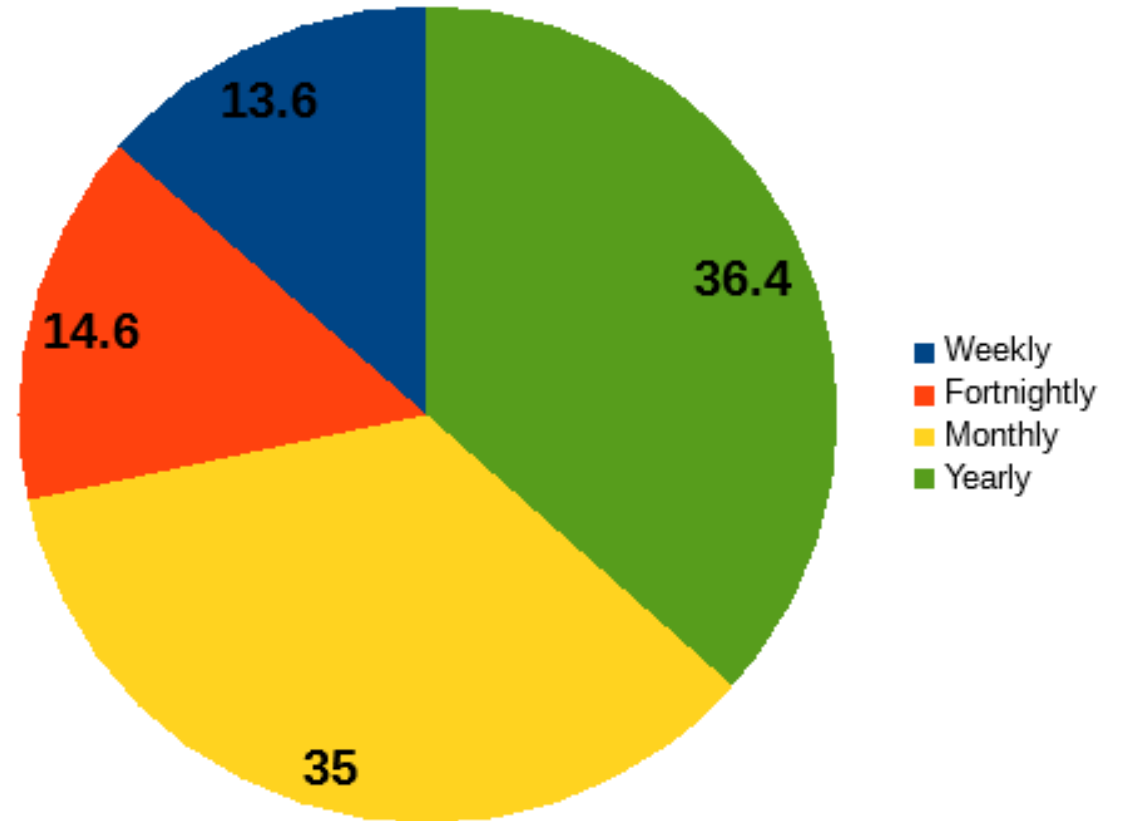
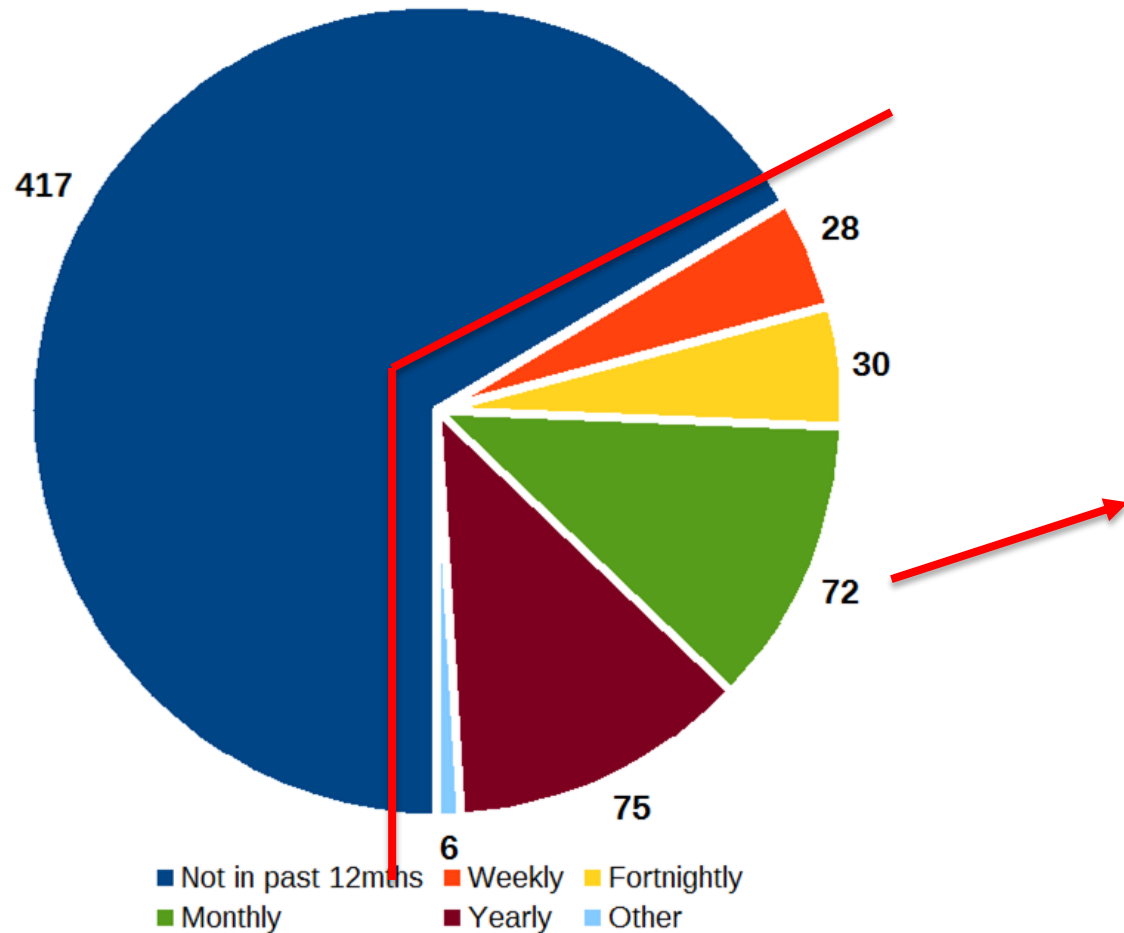
UDVL = Undetectable Viral Load



# Frequency of engaging in chemsex

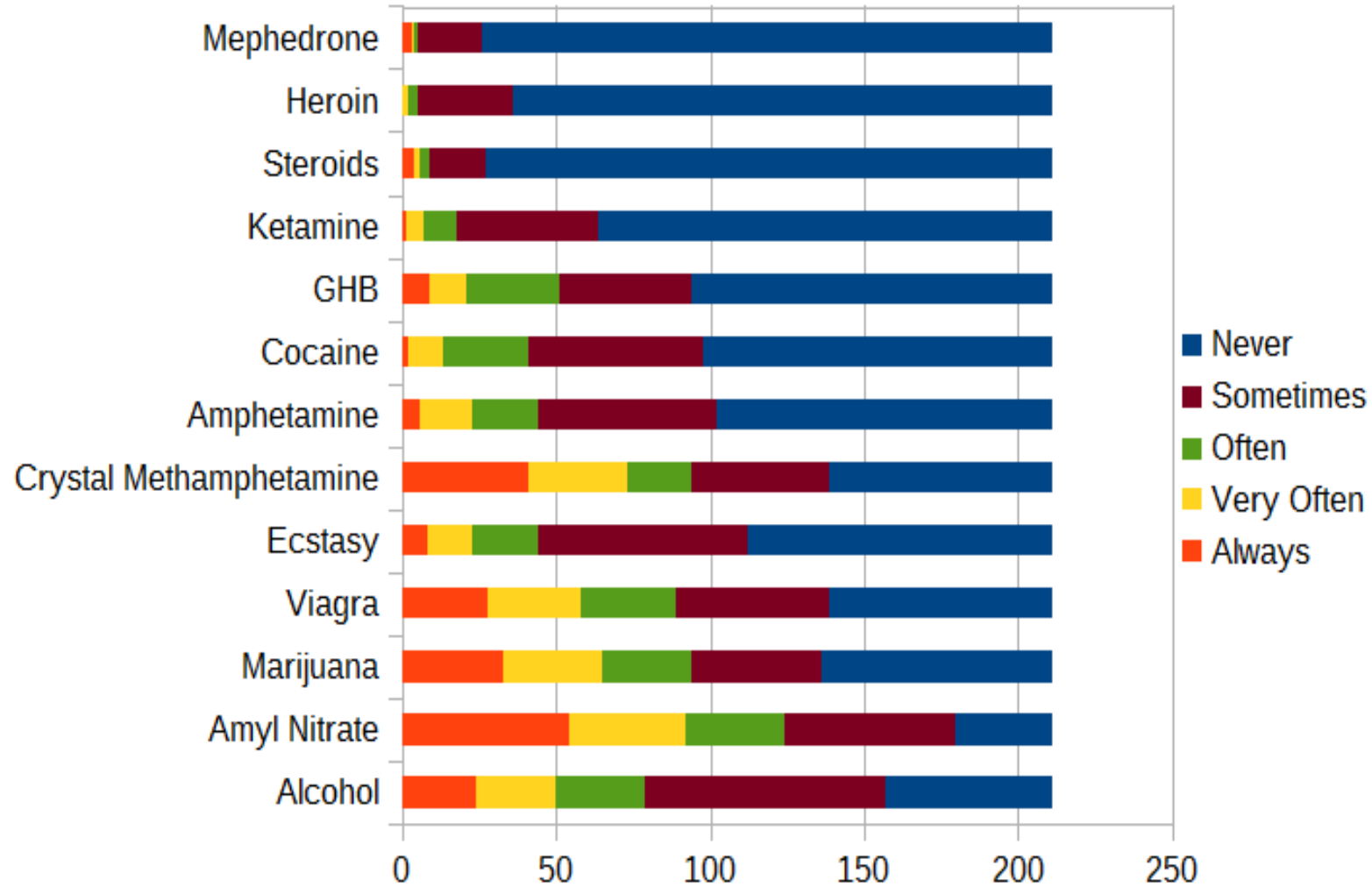


# Frequency of engaging in chemsex





# Drugs used during chemsex



# Responding to gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

The complex link between drug use (crystal methamphetamine in particular) and sexual activity amongst gay/MSM sets them apart from their heterosexual counterparts which requires a specialist response to prevention and treatment approaches for this group.

# Responding to gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

Access to harm reduction info relating to chemsex:

- Safer drug use and harm recognition
- Dealing with drug-related emergency situations
- Consent, respect for others and reducing sexual exploitation
- Transmission of STIs, including HIV and HCV
- Sexual satisfaction and safety
- HIV-related stigma and issues associated with HIV status disclosure
- Community and social network opportunities that do not include drugs and sex

# Responding to gay/MSM drug use and sexual activity

- Access for men to gay- specific and gay friendly drug and sexual health services that are competent to address the psychosocial aspects of their health and any harms arising from chemsex.
  - One on one counselling
  - Therapeutic groups
  - SMART Recovery groups
  - LGBTI cultural awareness training for mainstream services
- Early intervention: skilling up peers
- Continued research

# Importance of PrEP for gay/MSM engaging in chemsex

- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)
- Is an extremely effective prevention strategy where HIV neg people take anti-retroviral medication to prevent HIV infection
- QPrEPd Study: offering 2000 people free access to PrEP in QLD (300 places left)

# Acknowledgements

The participants

University of Southern Queensland

- Dr Amy Mullens
- Dr Erich Fein

Queensland AIDS Council - staff and volunteers

- Robert Muscolion
- Gary Williams

Lives Lived Well

# Relevant literature

- **Mullens, A.B., Young, R.McD., Hamernik, E. & Dunne, M.P.** (2009). The consequences of substance use among gay and bisexual men: A qualitative analysis. *Sexual Health, 6*, 139-152. (citations 13)
- **Mullens, A.B., Young, R.McD., Dunne, M.P.& Norton, G.** (2011). The Drinking Expectancy Questionnaire for MSM (DEQ-MSM): A measure of substance-related beliefs. *Drug & Alcohol Review, [30](#)*, 372-380. (citations 7)
- **Mullens, A.B, Debattista, J., Fisher, J., Stewart, M., Kenny, K., & Garvey, S.** (2017) Comparison of government and non government Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) treatment service delivery for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Community. *Substance Use & Misuse*.

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