

FRENCH REMOTE SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHEMSEXERS – A POLYVALENT TOOL TO HARM REDUCTION

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Background: Chemsex, use of psychoactive drugs in sexual context among men who have sex with men, can cause health difficulties for those practicing it, especially when they are isolated or far from medical care. It is essential for them to find caring and trained peer educators with harm reduction (HR) resources. Therefore, since 2017, AIDES (a French health organization fighting HIV and hepatitis) has developed several remote support services to break isolation through a community-based approach creating a non-judgmental space to express needs and build customized HR strategies; to reinforce links between chemsexers, community health workers and multidisciplinary health specialists; to monitor the evolution of chemsex practices.

Description of model of care/intervention: AIDES developed 4 combined remote support services: individual interviews with peers on WhatsApp; a Facebook page to share information, referrals and support; an anonymous support group in Telegram to share insight and information; 'a weekly remote discussion group in Teams for former chemsexers or chemsexers who want to stop.

Effectiveness: The Facebook group gathered 1800 users in five years (2018) while the Telegram support group gathered 123 members, exchanging around 90 messages per week, in 10 months since April 2022. 234 interviews were conducted through the WhatsApp support line in 2022, 95% of them leading to a suitable health care system referral. In 2022, these remote support services reached the chemsexers of a third of French departments in all regions. All these devices help to monitor the evolution of chemsexers' practices and the effects of drug policies. All the user satisfaction surveys showed extremely positive results. The number of users is constantly increasing.

Conclusion and next steps: All monitoring indicators show that these combined services are key tools to provide appropriate responses to chemsexers' issues, from health care systems development and harm reduction to drug policy advocacy. Greater promotion would help to reach chemsexers earlier and increase community engagement.

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