

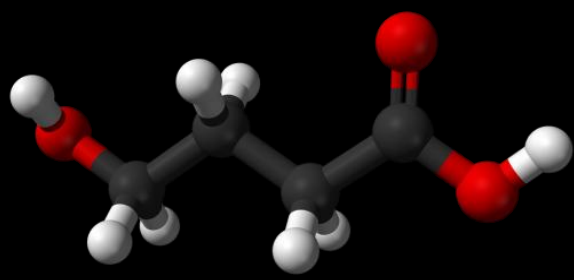
A Collaborative Response to Chemsex & GHB Usage in Ireland

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Introduction

Chemsex refers to the *use of substances* to facilitate or enhance sexual experience.

Three most commonly used chemsex drugs in Ireland:
- **Cocaine** or **Crack Cocaine**
- **Methamphetamines** – Crystal Meth (“T” or “Tina”)
- **GHB/GBL** (“G”) – Gamma Hydroxybutyrate/Gamma Butyrolactone



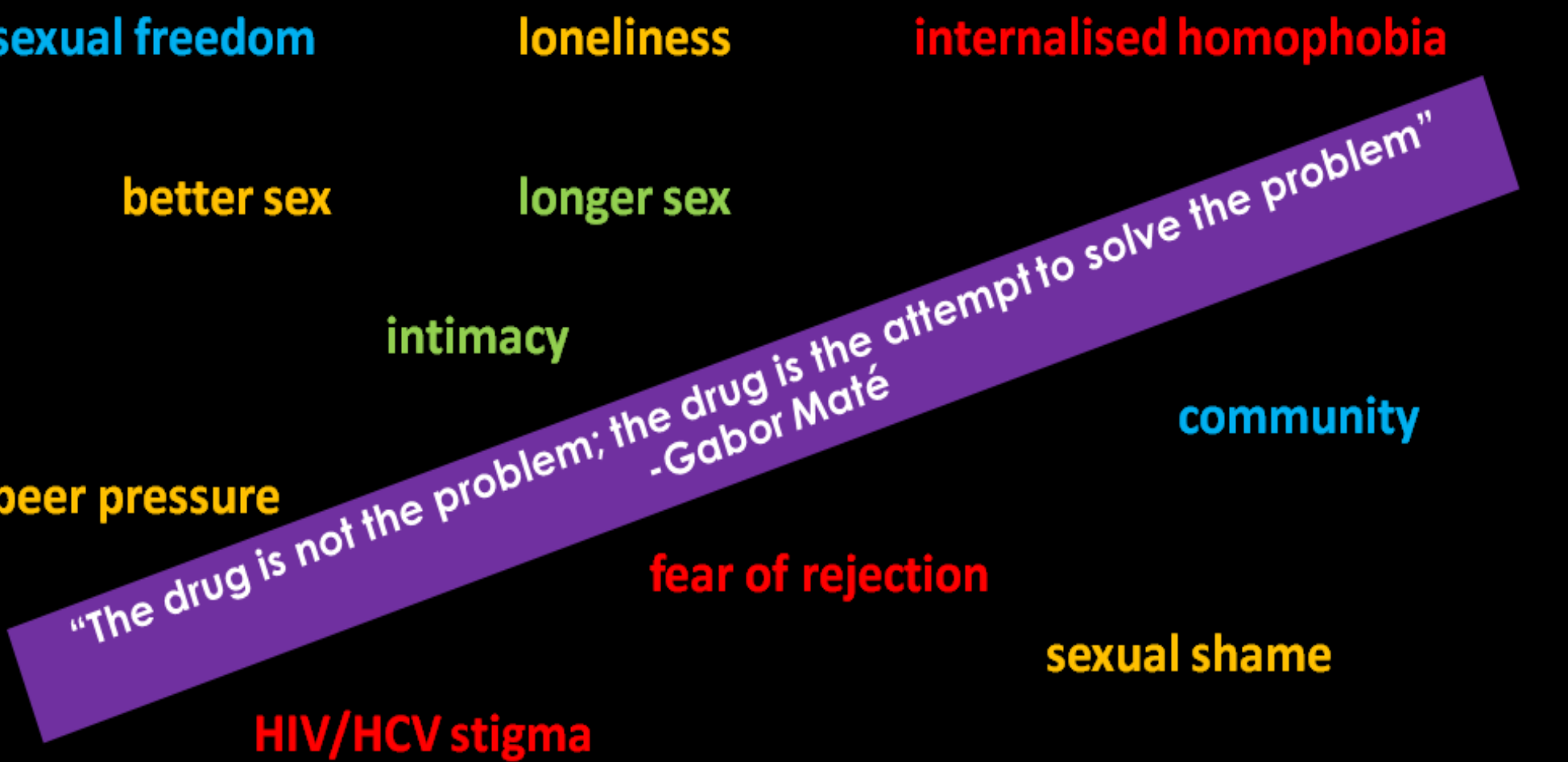
By 2010:
- **GHB/GBL** was popularised as a “party drug.”
Cheaper & No “hangover” after. Easily obtainable from online
- *Virtual social networking* increased
- *House parties* and private *sex parties* replaced socialising in clubs.

When someone is dependent on **GHB/GBL**
- May experience withdrawal symptoms which can *progress* in severity very *rapidly* if untreated
- can result in a *medical emergency* with potentially fatal complications.

Crystal meth is extremely addictive
- Very little literature about medical detoxification protocol for this substance

Reasons for Drug Use in Chemsex

Using substances during sex is associated with **disinhibition**, a sense of “**exploration and adventure**” and **euphoric** feelings.



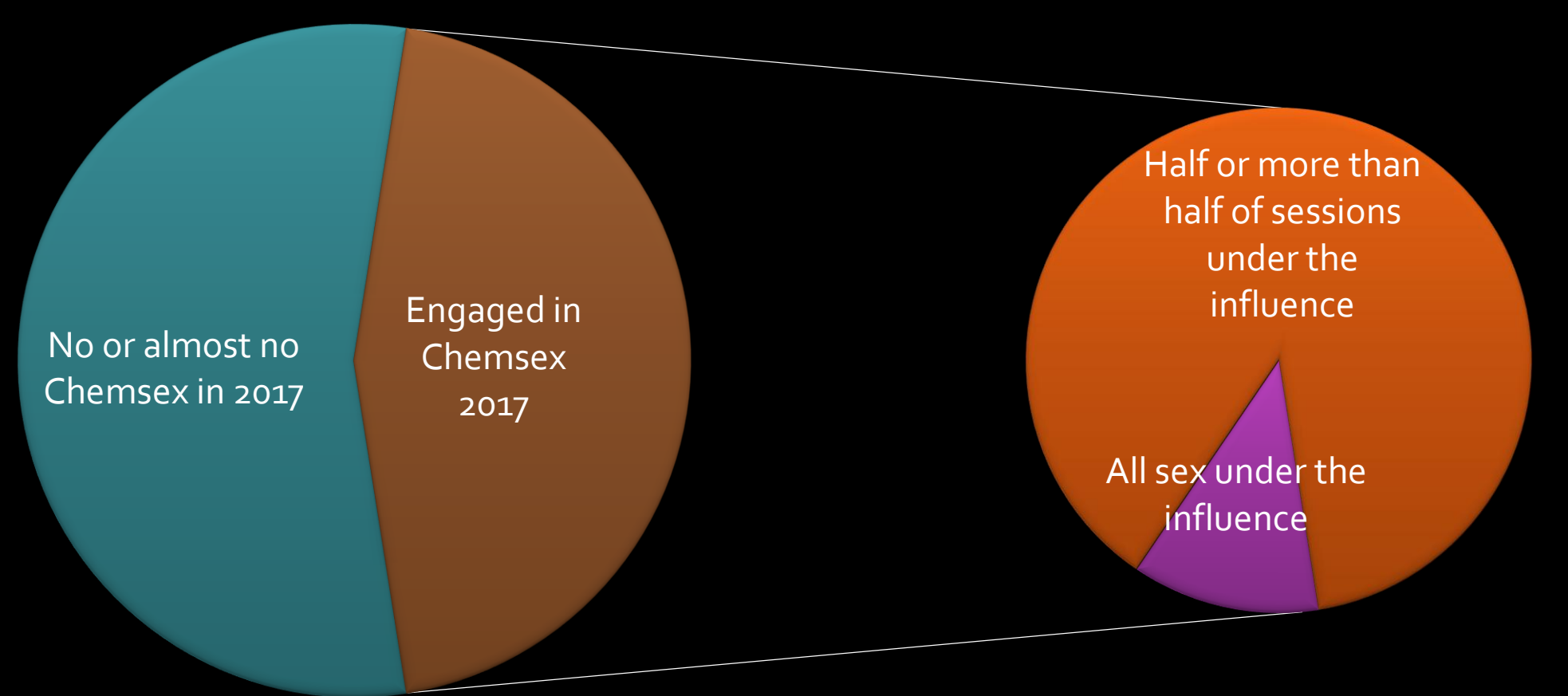
Different psychology & different terminology regarding substance misuse in chemsex.
e.g. “I ‘slam’ but ‘addicts’ inject!”

Risk of dependence increased when drugs used to self-medicate underlying mental health problems.

The Chemsex Population

European Men who have sex with Men Internet Survey (EMIS-2017) – **2083** participants in Ireland

Almost **1 in 2** of 1929 men who had sex with men in the previous 12 months did so under the influence. All or almost all of sex *under the influence* of alcohol or any drug in **1/8** of this cohort.



Survey done in the **Gay Men’s Health Service** (2015) – **568** participants
1 in 4 (23%) lost consciousness as a result of Chemsex



Problems Arising from Chemsex

Chemsex parties typically involve:
- **Multiple** partners
- **Polysubstance** misuse
- Weekend long “**binge sessions**”

Phone apps and *websites* make chemsex more visible and easier to access.

Increasing frequency of G being consumed with “T” (Crystal Meth - smoking/injecting)

“Novel injectors” present with medical & psychiatric complications



Concerning risks of “G&T” use include:
- *Overdose* & becoming unconscious
- **Small Quantities** measured
- Different **concentrations** in samples
- **Polysubstance use** increases risk
- *Non-consensual* sex or *unprotected sex*
- Presenting outside the window period for *PEP*
- Forgetting to take *PrEP*

Creating the “Perfect Storm” for HIV, Hepatitis C and/or STI transmission

Chemsex Working Group Ireland

Established to address chemsex and the harms associated with its related substance misuse.
- With the realisation that chemsex was not specific to any one specialty.

Involves the integration and collaboration of governmental & non-governmental organisations within the sectors of **Sexual Health, Public Health** and **Addictions** including:

- HIV Ireland
- Gay Men’s Health Service
- Rialto Community Drug Team
- HSE National Drug Treatment Centre
- HSE Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme
- Infectious Diseases Medicine, St. James’ Hospital
- Department of Public Health, Social Inclusion and Vulnerable Groups



Campaigns & Intervention Settings

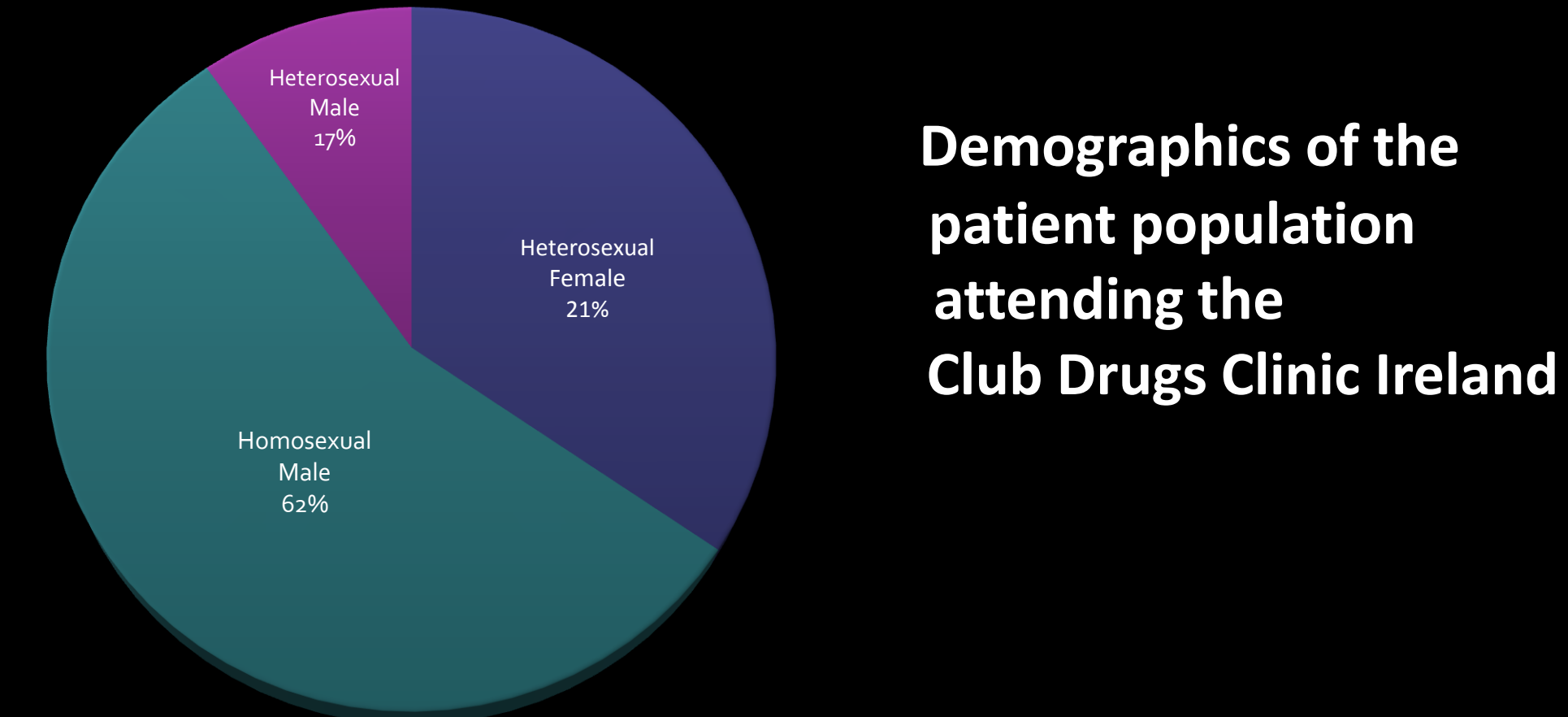
Innovative campaigns focused more on *harm reduction advice*, and emphasised *personal safety*.
This included developing:

G Cards – with information for both individuals and health care professionals
G Poster & Information Fact Sheets
G Harm Reduction video
Ongoing Chemsex Training Workshops – facilitated by GMHS & HIV Ireland

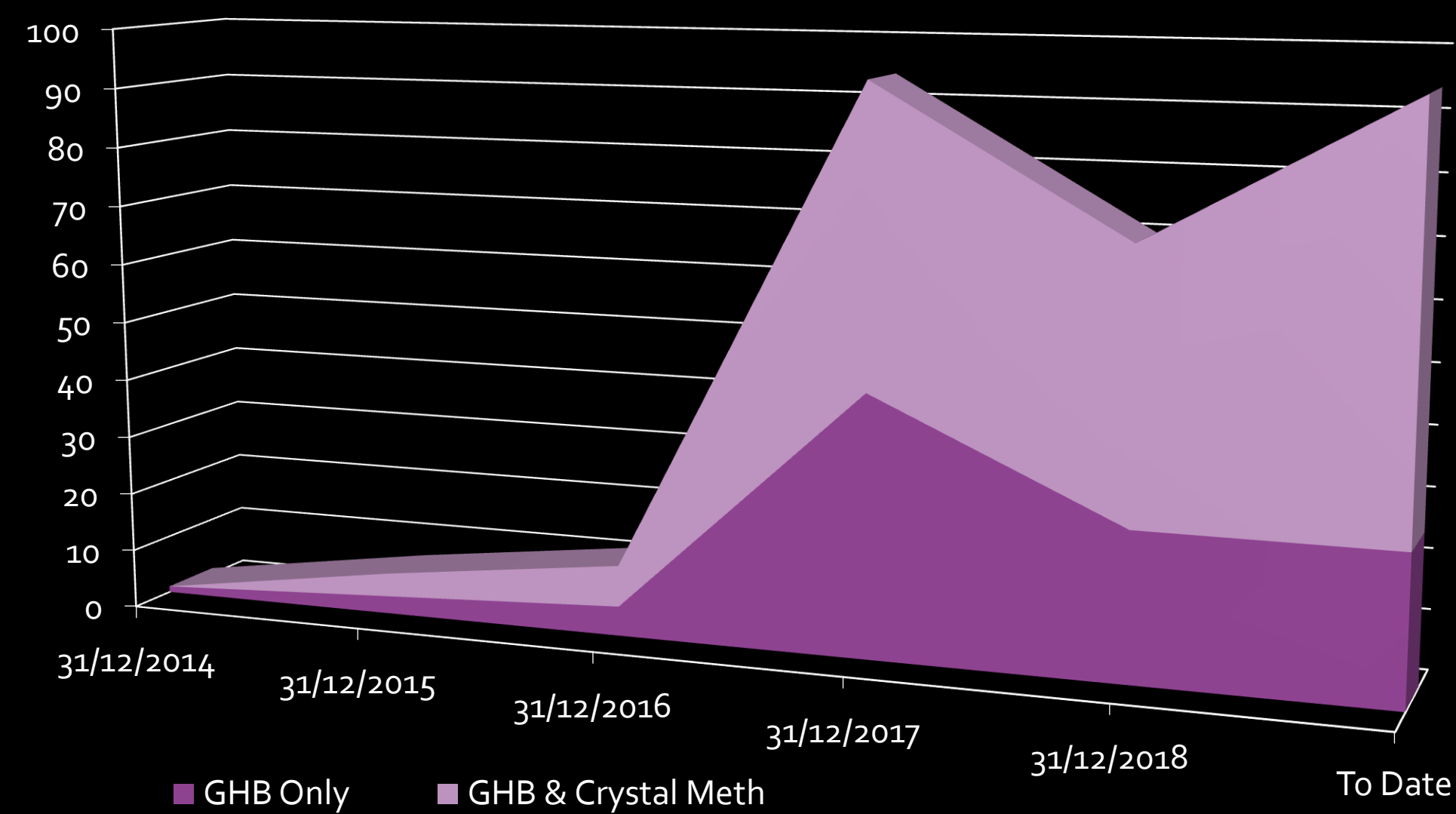
Increased awareness of the Club Drugs Clinic Ireland as a resource for Emergency Departments & Sexual Health Clinics
- Safe and medically supervised detoxification off GHB/GBL

The Club Drugs Clinic Ireland

191 referrals since 2014:
4% – admissions to dedicated detoxification ward
8% – medical admissions and completed in National Drug Treatment Centre
82% – *outpatient* detoxification episodes with continued support, counselling, and aftercare.



Relapse rate for GHB is approximately **70%** in Ireland, and internationally.
Highest risk of relapse – **1 week** post detoxification;
Reiterates the need for **structured, integrated follow up** and ongoing **Outreach support**.



Graph showing increase in presentations with both GHB & Crystal Meth Dependence over the years

Conclusions

The number of referrals to the Club Drugs Clinic Ireland continues to increase – indicative of an ongoing need for a streamlined referral pathway amongst various health services.

Campaigns developed by the Chemsex Working Group Ireland need to continue to engage the public – utilising technology to help achieve this.

Further research needed to continue monitoring and managing mental health, sexual health, consent, provision of party packs, and health promotion messaging.