

Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS concerns use of psychotropic substances among people conducting high-risk behaviour (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS:

The Hong Kong Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA) convened a meeting today (February 2). ACA members were briefed by the Department of Health (DH) on the latest situation of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection and relevant high risk behaviours in Hong Kong, including the use of psychotropic substances among the people concerned and its impact on local HIV control efforts.

The ACA acknowledged the evolving landscape of an international public health concern that people conducting high-risk behavior use psychotropic substances to enhance their sexual experiences. According to studies, using psychotropic substances in a sexualised context will increase the risk of acquisition of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI). It may also lead to mental health issues, other adverse health outcomes and even death. The behaviour of using psychotropic substances by men who have sex with men in a sexualised context is known as chemsex internationally.

The DH's literature review indicated that the prevalence of chemsex among men who have sex with men in Europe, the United States and Australia, etc, ranged from 10 per cent to 55 per cent, and it is approximately 19 per cent in Asia. Local studies estimated chemsex prevalence among men who have sex with men in Hong Kong to be 12 per cent to 19 per cent. The ACA has been concerned with the local trend of chemsex and the consequences inflicted by it on participants. According to the Recommended HIV/AIDS Strategies for Hong Kong (2022-2027) (the Strategies) published by the ACA in 2022, tailored interventions for subgroups of concern within a priority population (such as chemsex users) should be developed in accordance with their unique needs. It is necessary to integrate holistic services, including HIV testing and sexual health assessment, harm reduction and mental health support services. The Strategies placed significant emphasis on the importance to eliminate labelling and stigmas. To create an inclusive and accepting environment to facilitate those needed to access HIV and related services, efforts should be sustained to enhance the understanding of and sensitivity towards sexual minorities of service providers including healthcare workers.

To address the latest situation of chemsex, the ACA will partner with the Hong Kong Society for HIV Medicine and other collaborating organisations to organise a seminar on chemsex. The seminar will serve as an effective interdisciplinary platform to provide updated information of chemsex to relevant stakeholders, and facilitate discussion of the best strategy. The

seminar will also enhance relevant service providers to pool their resources and expertise to create a more comprehensive approach to meet the needs of people concerned.

During the meeting, the DH briefed members that a programme providing one-stop sexual health service for sexual minorities, namely The Commons will be launched on February 5. The ACA extended its appreciation to the DH for this endeavor to provide a combined HIV prevention programme for people conducting high-risk behaviour. The ACA considered that The Commons can foster close collaboration between government departments and non-governmental organisations, which will help create an inclusive and accepting environment.

Since its establishment in 1990, the ACA has been keeping under review local and international trends and development relating to HIV infection and AIDS. It has also played a pivotal role in advising the Government on policy relating to the prevention, care and control of HIV infection and AIDS in Hong Kong. The ACA has published six sets of recommended HIV/AIDS strategies which served as blueprints for the AIDS response in Hong Kong.

For more information on the previous and latest recommended HIV/AIDS strategies published by the ACA, please visit the ACA website (www.aca.gov.hk/english/index.html). For information about the local situation and programme on AIDS, please visit the website of the Virtual AIDS Office of the DH (www.aids.gov.hk).

