

# The therapeutic use of poppers by LGBTIQ communities in Australia and the unintended consequences of prohibiting alkyl nitrites

TGA's inquiry into regulatory options for appropriate access and safety controls for alkyl nitrite public consultation, Sydney.

Heath Paynter

Acting CEO, Australian Federation AIDS Organisations (AFAO)



Australian Government  
Department of Health  
Therapeutic Goods Administration



# Who we are

- **Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO)** is the national federation for the HIV community response. We provide leadership, coordination and support to Australia’s policy and advocacy response to HIV.
- The **National LGBTI Health Alliance** is the national peak health organisation in Australia for organisations and individuals that provide health-related programs, services and research focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people (LGBTI) and other sexuality, gender, and bodily diverse people and communities.



# Widespread therapeutic use of poppers

- Use as a **sexual aid** by gay and bisexual men and sex workers to make **anal sex less painful**.
- 45% of gay men in Sydney and 42% of gay men in Melbourne had used poppers in the last six months (GCPS 2018), with similar patterns of use in the other capitals.
- Widespread use, yet **extremely low incidence of harm** when used for the substance's therapeutic use as an inhalant.
- Anal sex among gay and bisexual men is **extremely common** and banning a substance that is used regularly as a therapeutic tool during sex between men will be **perceived as targeted towards** our communities.



Australian Government  
Department of Health  
Therapeutic Goods Administration



# The impact of a schedule 9 listing

- **Criminalise** the **safe therapeutic use** of poppers by a **significant number** of Australians
- Signal to the LGBTIQ community that their sexual practices are deviant
- Increase the availability of **unregulated formulations** with **unknown harms**
- Provide enforcement agencies with the power to **arbitrarily target** gay and bisexual men and sex workers
- **Reduce the willingness** of community members to **discuss poppers** with healthcare workers
- Increase the **administrative demands** on law enforcement agencies
- **Will not address the harms** associated with unintended misuse (i.e. swallowing)