

Regional Meeting on Chemsex Interventions May 29-30, 2024, at Tribe Hotel, Phnom Penh

EpiC Thailand, in collaboration with NAA, NCHADS, and EpiC Cambodia, hosted a regional meeting on sexualized drug use or chemsex on May 29–30, 2024, at the Tribe Hotel, Phnom Penh. The objective of the meeting was to share existing chemsex intervention practices in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam; develop a regional framework for chemsex interventions in outreach and clinical settings for key populations; and develop potential collaborations, joint implementation science research, and joint planning among the three countries. The meeting opened with welcoming remarks from Joseph Lawrence, HIV Team Lead, USAID/RDMA, and Assist. Prof. Ouk Vichea, Director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology, and STD (NCHADS). Dr. Vichea stressed that a strategy that fits the cultural and social context is important. He highlighted the importance of enhancing key population outreach efforts to address chemsex as a way of lowering HIV transmission in Cambodia. He mentioned that more implementation research is also needed. Dr. Vichea looked forward to hearing more, not only from the speakers but also from the attendees, on identifying key issues and priorities to help chart the way forward.



Forty-nine participants from the National AIDS Authority, Cambodia (NAA), NCHADS, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse (DMHSA), UNAIDS Cambodia, Institute of HIV Research and Innovation (IHRI), MPlus Foundation Thailand, National University of Singapore, Light House Vietnam, and United State, EpiC Cambodia, Khmer HIV/AIDS Alliance (KHANA), Friend International (FI), AIDS Healthcare Foundation (AHF), including community and network representatives in Cambodia joined the meeting.

Presentations included 1) Overview of HIV epidemic among MSM and TGW in Cambodia by NCHADS; 2) Findings from the qualitative research on chemsex in Cambodia by KHANA; 3) A desk review of chemsex interventions and experiences from Green House in Singapore by National University of Singapore; 4) Understanding the contexts in which chemsex takes place can help improve HIV-specific intervention and a chemsex study by Lighthouse Vietnam; 5) Chemsex and harm reduction projects in Thailand by IHRI; 6) Personalized cognitive counseling for chemsex interventions and Piloting a Brief Intervention for Cambodian MSM and Transgender Women who Engage in Chemsex by Columbia University, USA. In addition, a panel discussion among Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand participants focused on how to reach chemsex users; the challenges of program implementation; the role of peers, influencers, CBOs and key stakeholders; and then a discussion by countries, especially Vietnam and Cambodia about their work. This was followed by questions what does a comprehensive chemsex framework look like? what are examples of these services? and who should be providing these services, and what are their roles?



Closing remarks by H.E Tia Phalla, Vice Chair of National AIDS Authority (NAA), his deep gratitude for a successful meeting facilitated by EpiC-FHI360 to bringing together countries with diverse stories and energies, aimed at addressing chemsex interventions and fostering collaboration among practitioners, CBOs, stakeholders, health providers, researchers, and technical experts from Southeast Asia. He hoped that together a comprehensive chemsex framework tailored to the region's needs can be developed. The service models should meet the needs of chemsex users, and include friendliness, nonjudgmental approaches, and the involvement of healthcare providers who play a vital role in helping chemsex users and create enabling environments for change. The attendees shared practical models, lessons, and insights through the exchange learnings that can be adapted and applied in their home countries to enhance existing programs. The meeting's success lies in the shared knowledge and commitment to improve chemsex interventions and moving forward, practical solutions will strengthen the response to this critical issue.