# ADDRESSING DRUG USE ON DATING APPS

**2023 Report of Findings from NiceAF**, *an anti-stigma project from Building Healthy Online Communities*

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# HOW CAN THE ==REALITIES OF DRUG USE== LEAD TO THE ==FEWEST ISSUES== FOR ALL PARTIES: APP USERS, THEIR POTENTIAL PARTNERS, + APP OWNERS?

NiceAF, an anti-stigma project of Building Healthy Online Communities (BHOC), spent 2023 focusing specifically on how to best address the realities of drug use on dating platforms. BHOC undertook this effort with a number of factors in mind. We are aware that whether dating app users are using drugs or not, this issue is relevant. In our prior work, we found that over **50% of dating app users** (in a sample of over 3000 gay and bi men) **reported wanting to share their drug use preferences on the apps**. Additionally, **20% of dating app users** in a large study **reported using non-prescribed drugs and substances**.

We also understand that regardless of our opinions on drug use, legal factors play a factor in potential risks and liability of communicating about substance use; that being said, we kept these issues front and center when thinking about possible solutions. We also considered the **complexities of safety, stigma, and emotional reactions to drug use** and communication about drug use.

Throughout 2023, BHOC worked with **25 leaders in public health** to develop a focus group based on their guidance. Together with our **9 dating app partners**, we recruited **270 dating app users** from across the US. Participants represented a range of substance use practices, including sober/in recovery, never having used, using regularly, and specifically looking for PnP on dating apps.

## 270 DATING APP USERS PROPOSED 10 NEW FEATURES

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# WHAT IS THE CURRENT EXPERIENCE OF DRUG USE ON DATING PLATFORMS?

The default experience related to drug use–from people of all drug use practices–is negative.

- **91% reported at least one negative experience** related to drug use, including: sexual and physical violence; non-consensual drug use by partners; drugging; stigma; being ghosted; sexual side effects of drugs; robbery/law enforcement involvement
- **1 in 4 deleted a dating app** because of an issue related to drug use
- **80% of dating app users are not openly discussing drug use practices** while on dating platforms, worrying about legal vulnerabilities, data privacy, law enforcement involvement, and stigma (both drug use stigma and stigma for being sober/in recovery)

## CURRENT DRUG USE PRACTICES

| | |
|---|---|
| Occasional use | 31% |
| Rare use or never used | 30% |
| Regular use | 30% |
| Sober or in recovery | 9% |

(Scale: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100)

## SUBSTANCES USED IN LAST 12 MONTHS

| | |
|---|---|
| Alcohol | 67% |
| Pot/Cannabis | 60% |
| Poppers | 58% |
| Crystal Meth | 41% |
| Club Drugs | 33% |
| Tobacco | 29% |
| Cocaine | 23% |
| Hallucinogens | 23% |

(Scale: 0, 50, 100, 150, 200)

## 31% ARE USING DATING PLATFORMS TO FIND CHEMSEX/PNP PARTNERS

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# HOW DO DATING APP USERS + PUBLIC HEALTH LEADERS PROPOSE TO ADDRESS THESE REALITIES?

**Communication** Almost all participants wanted affirmative, explicit profile field options stating exactly what people were looking for and into when it came to substances. Concerns about legal vulnerabilities and being "outed" for using drugs impact the ability to provide affirmative communication features.

**Connection** Eighty percent (80%) wanted to filter others by their substance use practices. It's especially important to sober people or people in recovery to not be triggered by propositions of drug use. It's also important to people looking for chemsex to find partners they can vet to see if it's a match.

**Privacy & Security** Participants brought up an array of concerns regarding their privacy, digital & data security, and overall discretion. People who are using drugs specifically have urgent concerns and were twice as likely to request these features.

**Resources & Support** Participants felt that dating platforms should be providing science-based, information so that people can have more control over their bodies without sacrificing their pleasure–similar to how many already do so for sexual health. Including this information in FAQs/in-app health resources as well as improving content moderation were key elements mentioned.

## PROPOSED FEATURES
- PROFILE FIELDS ABOUT DRUG USE PRACTICES
- FILTERING BY SUBSTANCE USE COMFORTS/PRACTICES
- SECURITY FEATURES, LIKE SCREENSHOT BLOCKING
- HEALTH RESOURCES

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# HERE ARE ALL THE PROPOSED FEATURES + CHANGES:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Profile Field: "I'm not comfortable with…" | 86% |
| 2 | Profile Field: "Drug & alcohol practices" | 84% |
| 3 | Filtering | 80% |
| 4 | Profile Field/Tag: "No PnP" | 74% |
| 5 | Profile Highlight | 73% |
| 6 | Drug Use Matching | 65% |
| 7 | Screenshot Block | 64% |
| 8 | Profile Field: "I carry…" | 63% |
| 9 | Disappearing Messages | 55% |

- Offering resources & support
- Customer service resources & processes
- Content moderation improvements
- In-app substance use resources