

Breaking down barriers for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people in a tertiary alcohol and drug treatment service

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Introduction: LGBTQ people with alcohol and other drug (AOD) concerns experience challenges accessing and engaging in AOD treatment services, with poorer treatment outcomes compared to cis gendered and heterosexual people. This study explored the experiences of LGBTQ people accessing an AOD treatment service.

Method: Two focus groups were conducted with 12 LGBTQ identified adults attending a tertiary AOD treatment service, in Brisbane, Australia. Thematic analysis was used to explore the perceptions of the participants in relation to reasons for AOD use by LGBTQ people, access and treatment barriers, and recommendations to improve AOD services.

Results: Coping with minority stress, loss of support systems, perceptions of community pressure, and for gay men sexual enhancement, were reported by participants as the primary reasons for AOD use by LGBTQ people. Four main treatment barrier themes emerged: (i) being unaware of available treatment, costs and wait times; (ii) services not addressing LGBTQ specific issues; (iii) fears of discrimination within services; and (iv) confidentiality concerns.

Conclusion: Our study highlights the need for mainstream AOD services to be LGBTQ inclusive. Key recommendations to improve mainstream AOD services were: (i) having psychologically safe services; (ii) treatment addressing LGBTQ specific issues and making links to AOD use; (iii) provision of LGBTQ specific services, LGBTQ identified staff, and LGBTQ consumers involvement in mainstream services; (iv) services building better connections and referral pathways with LGBTQ communities; and (v) staff receiving ongoing professional development on LGBTQ issues.

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