PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY

A resource to support LGBTQ people affected by drug or alcohol use

PIVOT POINT

acon HERE FOR HEALTH

IS THIS INFORMATION FOR ME?

This information has been written by members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities and it is for our LGBTQ community peers and those who support us, including our friends, our partners and our families.

LGBTQ communities are unique and the ways in which we drink and/or use drugs can be different to the general population. This booklet addresses some of the specific circumstances and factors that influence the way that you can provide support for LGBTQ partners, friends and family with issues around alcohol and/or drug use.

If someone you care about is affected by substance use, then chances are you too may be affected and you may benefit from information and support. This booklet is also about helping you to look after yourself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We'd like to thank the LGBTQ community members who helped us to develop and review the content in this resource.

ACON acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which we work.

"THIS BOOKLET IS ABOUT HELPING YOU TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELF & OTHERS."

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PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY ARE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN IT COMES TO SUPPORTING LGBTQ PEOPLE

LGBTQ communities draw great strength and support from their peers and chosen families. This is particularly important as some of us do not have ongoing relationships with our biological families or families of origin. As a result many of us have forged our own family networks among our LGBTQ peers.

Seeking the support of a professional for issues related to drug and alcohol use can be difficult as shame and denial often prevent people from getting help. Stigma associated with drug and alcohol use can also make people reluctant to access services out of fear of judgement and discrimination.

As LGBTQ people we face further barriers. Research shows that those of us who need support often don't seek it. Many of us have had negative experiences with services that are not safe or inclusive for LGBTQ people.

We also know that many LGBTQ people use drugs and alcohol in the context of exploring sexuality and sexual intimacy. Not all of us are comfortable or confident to talk to a service provider about this experience.

For these reasons, the informal support provided by partners, families and friends is especially important to LGBTQ people.

One thing that we're really good at in LGBTQ communities is looking after each other.

"ONE THING THAT WE'RE REALLY GOOD AT IN LGBTQ COMMUNITIES IS LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHER."

WHY DO LGBTQ PEOPLE USE ALCOHOL AND DRUGS?

Like all people our reasons for using alcohol and drugs are varied. Many of us drink and use drugs to enjoy ourselves, to facilitate experiences of pleasure and to connect with others. Most LGBTQ people who use drugs do so in a way that does not negatively impact other areas of life such as finances, housing or employment.

On the whole, LGBTQ communities use alcohol and drugs more than the general population. The National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) has collected information on LGB people since 2010. The survey has consistently found that LGB people use illicit drugs and drink at higher rates than the general population.[1] A 2013 survey of Australian transgender people conducted by beyond blue found that 28.5% of participants had used illicit drugs within the previous 12 months by comparison to 14.5% of people in the general population.[2]

There are some commonly discussed ideas about why LGBTQ communities use drugs and alcohol more than the general population. One theory is that because historically we were excluded from a range of social settings we made bars and clubs an important social focus. To this day we regularly, form and celebrate our communities in bars, clubs and at dance parties where drugs and alcohol are present.

Some LGBTQ people also combine the use of drugs with having sex and therefore using drugs can become associated with experiencing sexual intimacy and interpersonal connection.

It is also thought that LGBTQ people commonly use drugs and alcohol as a way of coping with trauma and/or the stresses associated with being part of a minority group. Many of us have experienced and continue to experience prejudice, discrimination and harassment that is associated with our sexuality or gender. Some LGBTQ people use drugs and alcohol to alleviate the stresses associated with these experiences.

[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: detailed findings. Drug Statistics series no. 31. Cat. no. PHE 214. Canberra: AIHW.

[2] Hyde Z, Doherty M, Tilley PJM, McCaul KA, Rooney R, Jancey J (2014) The First Australian National Trans Mental Health Study: Summary of Results. School of Public Health, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

HOW DO I KNOW IF ALCOHOL AND/OR OTHER DRUG USE IS A PROBLEM OR NOT?

It can be difficult to know when alcohol or drug use has become a problem for someone you care about.

Because LGBTQ communities often socialise in spaces where drugs and alcohol are consumed it can be hard to socialise without using alcohol and/or other drugs. Because drinking and/or taking drugs is often closely linked to socialising in LGBTQ communities, it can make it hard for us to recognise when those we care about are using in a way that might be causing problems.

Some signs that could indicate that alcohol and/or other drugs use is disrupting or having a negative effect on someone's life include:

Money

- More of their time and money is spent on alcohol and/or other drugs.
- They are always short of money, in debt or trying to borrow money.

Patterns of use

- You notice they are increasing the amount or frequency of alcohol and/or other drugs they are using.
- They are finding it hard to stop using alcohol and/or other drugs.
- Their alcohol and/or other drugs use in non-social situations may be increasing or preventing them from socialising.

Health

- Their day to day health is affected.
- Their energy levels, motivation and overall well-being is low or decreasing.
- They are depressed, withdrawn, agitated, and/or overreacting to situations that usually wouldn't have bothered them.

Commitments and relationships

- They may not be following through on plans and commitments.
- Work or study may be suffering.
- Relationships may break down or be damaged.

Communication

- They may not respond to calls or messages or may seem to disappear for days at a time.
- Their behaviour on social media may seem erratic or out of character.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and these indicators alone don't necessarily mean that someone is using alcohol and/or other drugs in a problematic manner. However, a combination of these may be an indicator that they need help.

IS IT ABOUT ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE, OR IS IT ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

Many people who have a mental health problem also have problems with their alcohol and/or other drug use. Alcohol and/or other drugs can affect mental health, and mental health issues can impact on a person's alcohol and/or other drug use. It can be hard to tell whether changes in someone's behaviour or mood are due to mental health problems, alcohol and/or other drug use or both.

This concern is particularly relevant to LGBTQ people as many of us experience poor mental health directly related to our experience of stigma, prejudice and discrimination on the basis of being LGBTQ.

Compared to the general population:

- LGBTQ people aged 16 and over are nearly three times more likely to be diagnosed with depression in their lifetime.[3]
- LGB people aged 16 and over are more than twice as likely to currently meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder.[3]
- Transgender people aged 18 and over are nearly three times more likely to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime.[3]
- People with an Intersex variation aged 16 and over are twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety in their lifetime.[3]
- People from LGBTQ communities have the highest rate of suicide of any population in Australia.[4]

When supporting an LGBTQ person with their alcohol and or drug use, be mindful that they may use drugs or alcohol to alleviate symptoms associated with poor mental health and that this use can in turn contribute to ongoing mental health problems.

[3] National LGBTI Health Alliance, 'The Statistics at a glance: The mental health of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people in Australia'. Accessed at: https://lgbtihealth.org.au/statistics/

[4] Rosenstreich, G. (2013) LGBTI People Mental Health and Suicide. Revised 2nd Edition. National LGBTI Health Alliance. Sydney

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT AN LGBTQ LOVED ONE WITH THEIR SUBSTANCE USE

If a partner, friend or family member needs support or if they are ready for a change, you can help them to address their relationship with substances.

We care for the important people in our lives in so many ways - by listening and talking about what's going on in each other's lives, by letting people know we are concerned about them, by just being there when we are needed… this is great but it's not always easy.

Knowing what to do or how best to provide support can be challenging. Below we have listed some tips that can help you with this.

- Practice open communication. Talking about issues as they arise will allow people to plan the steps they need to take.
- Allow the person to make choices for themselves and be mindful that their choices may be different from your choices.
- Get to know the outcome that the person you are supporting is seeking, for example, do they wish to stop using altogether or do they want to cut down their use?
- Try not to get too focused on one solution or outcome, there is no one solution or outcome that works for everyone.
- Being positive and encouraging is generally far more effective than placing pressure on someone who is already in a challenging situation.
- It is helpful to discuss the issues when you are calm.
- Be aware that temporary lapses (i.e. using alcohol and/or other drugs) are common when people are aiming to change their use. This can be an opportunity to reassess things and start afresh and does not mean failure
- Keep things private, LGBTQ communities are small and respecting confidentiality is important.

Remember it's ok to feel like we don't have all the answers, nor can we fully understand what's going on for someone. It is also natural for us to want to help or even 'fix' the situation or the person we love, but we must understand that we can't. Often the best thing we can do is to be there for them and convey we are available to listen, believe things can get better, and help them to get support.

If you are unsure of what your friend or family member needs from you in terms of practical support, ask them, "If I were being really helpful when you are having a bad day or moment, what would I be doing?"

THE STAGES OF CHANGE

1 PRE-CONTEMPLATION

People in this stage don't want to make any change to their habits and don't recognise that they have a problem. It is difficult to reach, or help people in the pre-contemplation stage. It may take an emotional trigger, a health event or another significant event to move people out of this stage.

2 CONTEMPLATION

During this stage, someone is weighing the costs and benefits of making changes to their lives. They are contemplating whether making the change will be worth it.

Setting powerful, motivational goals and visualising results can be very helpful for someone in the contemplative stage. Ask the person, "how would your life be after you have made a change?" This can help them to imagine life after the positive change.

3 PREPARATION

People in the preparation stage have decided to change. It is a significant thing to be at this stage. This is when people start to make plans. These might include reading up on health information, making appointments, looking at self-help groups or setting goals.

At this stage showing belief and confidence in the person is important as it will help the person put plans into action.

4 ACTION

The action stage is the process of making changes, these changes might include: taking steps to reduce potential harms around using alcohol and/or drugs, cutting back use, or quitting altogether.

Celebrating milestones big and small can have a big impact in this stage. It is important to recognise achievements, to reward and celebrate them.

5 SLIPS, LAPSE & RELAPSE

A slip, lapse or relapse can occur at any part in the change cycle and does not mean that someone is back to the start of their change journey.

Slip – A temptation to return to past behaviours, a slip is a little wobble but forwards momentum is maintained.

Lapse - A lapse is falling down and giving in, but standing back up almost immediately and moving forwards.

Relapse - A full return to previous behaviours, or habits.

Slips, lapses and relapses can be opportunities to revise goals; identify what has worked, what didn't and think about what is realistic and achievable.

6 MAINTENANCE

This is the stage of successful, sustained lifestyle modification. This goes beyond the behaviours associated with alcohol and/or drug use and incorporates positive health changes that have been made to support change such as healthy habits around exercise, eating, passions and interests.

As a partner, family member or friend often the best thing we can do is hold hope and confidence that things will improve, avoid being judgemental or angry. Remember it is important to celebrate successes no matter how small or short lived.

"WHEN SOMEONE WANTS TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOURS, THIS CHANGE DOES NOT HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. CHANGE IS A PROCESS."

“SPEND TIME ENGAGED IN ACTIVITIES AND IN ENVIRONMENTS THAT DON’T INVOLVE SUBSTANCE USE.”

WHAT IF USING ALCOHOL AND/ OR OTHER DRUGS TOGETHER IS A PART OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP?

If using alcohol and/or other drugs together is part of your relationship you may need to change some of your own practices and behaviours in order to be supportive.

Not using alcohol and or drugs around the person is a supportive act. While you may be in control of your own use, being around drugs and alcohol can be a trigger to those with more harmful patterns of use so be mindful of any difficulties they might be experiencing.

Try to spend time with them engaged in activities and in environments that don’t involve substance use. While you are not responsible for policing their substance use, you can be thoughtful and caring, and try to avoid what might be triggering for them.

If you are out and about with the person at an event where people are drinking and/or taking drugs, let the person know that you’re happy to leave with them at any time should they wish to leave.

CARING FOR YOURSELF WHILE YOU ARE CARING FOR SOMEONE ELSE

In order for us to offer support to another person regarding alcohol and/or other drug use, it's important that we look after our own health and wellbeing. It is normal for people close to someone who is working through alcohol and/or other drug use issues to experience a large range of conflicting emotions. These could include feelings of isolation, anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, frustration, fear and stigma.

People in this situation can also feel that they are solely responsible for resolving the issue, which can lead to them feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.

Tips for looking after yourself

- It is important to realise that a person's alcohol and/or other drug use will only change when they are ready to change it. Too much worry and taking care of a person with alcohol and/or other drug use problems can result in you getting burnt- out or feeling overwhelmed.
- It is okay to ask for help as you need support too.
- Allow yourself to experience mixed emotions over the situation.
- Take time to do things for yourself. It is important that you continue to feel good about yourself.
- Keep in contact with other people in your social circles and maintain your own social network.
- People in situations similar to you can find that it's difficult trying to be a 'carer' as well as a friend or partner. Try to spend quality, relaxed time with the person, to maintain the relationship with them.
- Be aware that supporting someone through their alcohol and/or other drug use issue could trigger feelings and memories from your own past experiences.
- Remember that when caring for someone affected by alcohol and/or other drug use you have options as well. In some cases it may become unsafe for you to stay in a situation if you feel it is impacting negatively on you.
- Supporting someone with their substance use can take away from other responsibilities and relationships which can take a toll. It is ok and necessary to make time for other relationships in your life.
- Remember that there are services that can offer you support, including ACON's Substance Support Service and Family Drug Support.

"YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO AN LGBTQ INCLUSIVE WORKER."

WHAT SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

There are a range of services for people who are experiencing problems with their alcohol and/or other drug use, depending on their individual needs.

Options include

- Face to face counselling
- Phone or online counselling
- Group support
- Detoxification and rehabilitation (which can mean either living at a treatment centre or day visits)
- Medications like methadone (for people who use opioid drugs)

Supportive therapies like acupuncture, diet, massage and exercise can also be helpful.

TIPS FOR FINDING A SERVICE THAT UNDERSTANDS OUR COMMUNITY

- Finding the right worker to help you can be very individual. If you are uncomfortable with a particular worker it is okay to request another worker.
- You have a right to ask for an LGBTQ inclusive worker.
- If you are unhappy with the service, it is important to provide feedback so that the service can be improved.
- Remember not all programs work for everyone and it can mean that it is just a matter of finding the service that is the best fit for you

ACON can assist you in finding the right service. ACON is working closely with mainstream drug and alcohol services to build their understanding of the needs of our community.

If you would like assistance in finding drug and alcohol services see the services list or contact ACON's Alcohol and other Drugs Program on 02 9206 2000 or email aod@acon.org.au

SERVICE DIRECTORY

ACON

ACON offers a range of services to members of the, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer communities and people living with HIV including

- A Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) that provides people with FREE sterile injecting equipment and safer injecting advice;
- Clinic 414 which provides FREE, anonymous and confidential health care services (such as Hepatitis C assessment and access to treatment, wound care, sexual health check-ups and general check-ups) to people who use drugs and;
- Substance support which provides confidential FREE short term counselling (up to 12 sessions) for LGBTI people and people with HIV seeking support in relation to their use of alcohol and other drugs. This service is also available for partners, families and others impacted by a LGBTQ person's AOD use including those who do not identify as members of the LGBTQ communities.

ACON Sydney
414 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010.

ACON Lismore
27 Uralba St, Lismore NSW 2480

ACON Hunter
129 Maitland Road Islington NSW 2296

Phone: 02 9206 2000
Website: acon.org.au
Facebook: facebook.com/aconhealth

PIVOT POINT

Pivot Point is a website with information about alcohol and drugs for the LGBTQ community

Website: pivotpoint.org.au

YOUR SERVICE HUB

Your Service Hub is an online directory of alcohol and other drugs support, health and welfare services.

Website: yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/getting-help/Pages/your-service-hub.aspx

ADIS (ALCOHOL AND DRUG INFORMATION SERVICE)

ADIS is a 24 hour telephone based information and referral service call 1800 250 015

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA)

Alcoholics anonymous are a 12-step based abstinence self-support group for people who have a problem with alcohol or suspect they may have a problem.

Phone: 1300 222 222
Website: aa.org.au

CARERS NSW

Carers NSW is an association for relatives and friends caring for people with a disability, mental illness, drug and alcohol dependencies, chronic condition, terminal illness or who are frail.

Phone: 1800 242 636
Website: carersnsw.asn.au

CMA - CRYSTAL METH ANONYMOUS (NSW)

A 12-step fellowship group for people wanting to quit their use of crystal methamphetamine.

Phone: 0414 660 851

FAMILY DRUG SUPPORT (FDS)

Family Drug Support is a non-religious and non-judgemental support and information service for people who have a friend or family member with a drug problem.

Phone: 1300 368 186 (this number operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week)
Website: fds.org.au

LOCAL INTAKE LINES

Each NSW Health local health district has a local central intake telephone line to connect people with alcohol and other drug services in that region. Note that some local intake lines operate during business hours only. ADIS can be contacted 24 hours 7 days a week.

Website: health.nsw.gov.au/aod/Pages/contact-service.aspx

THE MENTAL HEALTH LINE

The Mental Health Line is a 24-hour telephone service operating seven days a week across NSW

Phone: 1800 011 511

NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS (NA)

Narcotics Anonymous is a 12-step based abstinence self-support group for people who have a problem with drug use or suspect they may have a problem.

Phone: 1300 652 820
Website: na.org.au/multi/meetings

NAR-ANON

Nar-Anon groups are self-help support groups for family and friends of people who have a problem with drugs.

Phone: (02) 9418 8728
Website: naranon.com.au

NUAA

The New South Wales Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peer based organisation. NUAA provides information, referral and support and free sterile injecting equipment.

Phone: 02 8354 7300 or 1800 644 413
Website: nuaa.org.au

PIVOT POINT

Pivot Point is a website with information about alcohol and drugs for the LGBTQ community

Website: pivotpoint.org.au

RAINBOW RECOVERY

The Rainbow Recovery Club provides a meeting place, primarily for gay, lesbian and transgender people, in twelve step program.

For more information:
rainbowrecoveryclub.org.au
secretary@rainbowrecoveryclub.org.au

S-CHECK

The Stimulant Check-up is a comprehensive health check where people can explore the impacts of their stimulant use on their health and day to day functioning. The clinic is free of charge and available for people who use stimulants and who are not particularly seeking drug treatment and who have some concerns or questions around their use of substances.

Phone: 02 9361 8079
Facebook: facebook.com/SCheckClinic

SMART RECOVERY GROUP

Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) groups offer support and strategies for people who want to manage their alcohol and other drug use.

Phone: 02 9373 5100
Website: smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au

STIMULANT TREATMENT LINE

The Stimulant treatment line is NSW wide telephone service that provides education, information, referral, crisis counselling and support specifically for people who use stimulant drugs such as methamphetamine, ecstasy and cocaine.

Phone: Sydney Metropolitan 02 9361 8088 or Regional & rural NSW: free call * 1800 10 11 88
Website: svhs.org.au

STIMULANT TREATMENT PROGRAM (STP)

STP is an LGBTQ friendly counselling service for people who have concerns with their stimulant drug use.

Phone: (02) 9361 8088
Website: svhs.org.au

TWENTY10

If you are under the age of 26 and identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer or transgender or are same-sex attracted, gender diverse or intersex, Twenty10 can help you access the support you may need.

Phone: (02) 8594 9555
Website: twenty10.org.au

QLIFE

QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

Phone: 1800 184 527
Website: qlife.org.au

YOUR ROOM

Your Room provides information and facts about the most commonly used drugs affecting Australians right now

Website: yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au

The following services s specialise in supporting people with co-existing mental health issues and substance use issues:

THE BUTTERY

The Buttery is a residential therapeutic rehabilitation centre in northern NSW for people living with drug use and mental health issues.

Phone: 02 6687 1111
Website: buttery.org.au

JARRAH HOUSE

Jarrah House is a residential treatment program in Sydney for women living with drug use and mental health issues. Jarrah House allows children.

Phone: 02 9661 6555
Website: jarrahhouse.com.au

KEDESH REHABILITATION SERVICES

Kedesh is a medium-term residential treatment facility in the Wollongong area for people living with drug use and mental health issues.

Phone: (02) 4222 1800
Website: kedesh.com.au

ODYSSEY HOUSE

Odyssey House offers community services including alcohol and other drug and mental health counselling as well as family and parent support programs. Odyssey House provides residential services, including withdrawal, rehabilitation and mental health programs.

Phone: 1800 397 739
Website: odysseyhouse.com.au

WHOS

WHOS provides therapeutic programs aimed at achieving recovery from alcohol and other drug dependence incorporating harm reduction and other mental health initiatives.

Phone: WHOS has a number of facilities, each with a different telephone number, a list of their contact numbers is available at this web address whos.com.au/contact-us

Website: whos.com.au

If someone is in danger or showing signs of overdose; don't hesitate. Call 000 immediately.

PARTNERS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY

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PIVOT POINT

This resource is proudly funded by the NSW Ministry of Health