

# How Treatment Centers Can Better Serve the LGBTQ+ Community Facing Substance Use Disorders

The LGBTQ+ community has become more prevalent in today's society, with an estimated 16 million Americans identifying as LGBTQ+, and is seen in a higher percentage through the generations.

Recognizing the fact that Substance Use Disorder (SUD) can impact anyone's life is imperative to recognizing the need for treatment centers with programs specific to the LGBTQ+ community. Statistics point to the need for treatment programs for substance use disorders, as LGBTQ+ are 2.5 times more likely to develop SUD than those who do not identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community.

By pairing with a partner who is well versed in the specificities of the LGBTQ+ community, your treatment center can develop a program to facilitate the LGBTQ+ demographic. This will allow you to aid a population that experiences SUD at a much higher rate than the general population.

## Defining LGBTQ+ and Substance Use Disorders

The LGBTQ+ community is comprised of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people. Cisgender refers to individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. The LGBTQ+ is very complex and encompasses a variety of identities.

Each of the letters in LGBTQ+ stands for something. For example, lesbians are women attracted to other women. Gay refers to those who are attracted to someone of the same gender as themselves. Bisexuals are attracted to several genders. The letter T represents trans community members, and Q in LGBTQ+ can mean questioning or queer. The "+" refers to other sexual identities, such as pansexual and asexual. Non-binary people are also encompassed within the LGBTQ+ community.

Substance use disorders can drastically impact a person's life. They are divided into categories - impaired control, risky use, social impairment, and pharmacological criteria. The number of symptoms a person experiences determines the severity of the disorder, with 2-3 symptoms considered mild, 4-5 symptoms considered moderate, and 6 or more symptoms considered severe.

Substance use disorder impacts the person's brain and is not voluntary, with physical differences in areas responsible for decision-making, behavior, learning, memory, and judgment.

## Mental Health Within the LGBTQ+ Community

Members of the LGBTQ+ are at a higher risk of developing mental health problems. For example, individuals of this community are more than twice as likely to develop mental disorders as opposed to cisgendered individuals.

In addition, LGBTQ+ members may potentially experience psychosis, bipolar disorder, and other mood disorders. These disorders present themselves under the oppression individuals face daily simply because of how they identify sexually or with regards to their gender.

LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and eating disorders than cisgender people. They are at higher risk for experiencing crippling depressive episodes as well as suicidal thoughts.

With higher levels of discrimination and stress, LGBTQ+ members are more likely to experience eating disorders. Additionally, members are at an elevated risk for PTSD at the hands of increased risk of violence and trauma due to their identity.

One of the considerable components lurking beneath the LGBTQ+ mental illness issues is the minority stress model, which essentially indicates the community's idiosyncratic challenges, causing added stress and complications to an already challenging life.

Members of this community are at a higher risk of hate crimes and assaults and face homophobia at various levels. In addition, poverty, homelessness, and unemployment are also stressors that LGBTQ+ members are subjected to.

## Prevalence of Substance Use in the LGBTQ+ Community and Commonly Abused Drugs

Similar to mental illnesses, substance use is more prevalent in the LGBTQ+ community than the straight or cisgender community. The oppression members face can cause the development of a substance use disorder originating from these hardships. Studies have indicated that substance use is due to stress-related coping.

There are several substances abused within the LGBTQ+ community, including alcohol, stimulants, and opioids. Alcohol use is common among members, and misuse can spiral into a variety of problems and risks.

Stimulants are common within the community, more so than those who are not in the community. The stimulants include cocaine and methamphetamine, as well as other drugs within the same classification. The risk of opioid use is higher for LGBTQ+ members, although there is not very much information on the topic.

## Available Treatment Options and Trauma-Informed Care

Treatment options for the LGBTQ+ community vary, from detox therapy to medication-assisted treatment. Centers that do not currently offer specific treatment programs for the LGBTQ+ community should do so immediately to meet this community's distinct needs.

The waiting room can be made warm and welcoming through LGBTQ+ media and pamphlets, as well as non-discrimination policies that are upheld and enforced. Incorporating staff members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community can also help ease patients, as well as creating gender neutral bathroom spaces. Cultural humility and remaining current on possible stressors for the community will also aid in the mental health of patients, such as using the proper pronouns.

Recognizing potential traumas LGBTQ+ members may have encountered and experienced can help the recovery from substance abuse disorder. Furthermore, identifying these issues and traumatic experiences may help the patient feel safe in the environment on the road toward recovery.

In early 2021, President Biden signed an Executive Order that protects the community by applying these protections to federal laws, regulations, and agencies. Paired with the 2020 Supreme Court ruling that gender identity and sexual orientation are protected from discrimination through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, discrimination based on either of those is forbidden of anyone doing business with the federal government. With the adjustments President Biden has made, changes are happening faster than initially anticipated.

## Why Is Connecting With The LGBTQ+ Community Vital?

Implementing a tailored program aimed toward the LGBTQ+ community is crucial for treatment centers because it allows for the center to reach out to many more within the world to lend a helping hand in treating addiction, if. If members of the LGBTQ+ community feel welcome with the affirming programs, more community members will be drawn to your treatment center for help.

Understanding the hardships the LGBTQ+ community faces will allow for a higher quality of care. Providing the LGBTQ+ community with services like treatment programs targeting substance use disorders will not only aid the community, but assist in the growth of the facility.

For more in-depth information on LGBTQ+ and addiction treatment, please read "[LGBTQ+ Affirming Addiction Treatment](#)" brought to you by Headlands ATS. This article does a fantastic job of highlighting common issues the LGBTQ+ community faces and emphasizes the need for treatment programs adjusted toward welcoming LGBTQ+ patients.