

Supporting Recovery within the LGBTQI+ Community

The Office of Recovery has a vital role in advancing SAMHSA's commitment to and support of behavioral health recovery for all. On May 15 and 16, 2024, the Office of Recovery hosted a convening with the LGBTQI+ community to engage stakeholders at the local, state and national levels to understand variables that impact the expansion of recovery supports, identify gaps, as well as discuss scalable solutions to increase recovery support service access for the LGBTQI+ community.

The 2022 Results of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) Data identified 53.5% or 11.8M Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) Adults had used illicit drugs in the past year (2022).

- *8.1M LGB Adults had a substance use disorder*
- *LGB young adults (18-25) were more likely to have a past year drug use disorder than LGB adults aged 26 or older.*
- *The prevalence of mental illness was highest among LGB young adults (18-25) for both any mental illness as well as serious mental illness.*
- *Thoughts of suicide, suicide plans and suicide attempts were highest (10% higher) among LGB young adults aged 18 to 25.*
- *2 in 3 (68.4%) of LGB adults who ever had a substance use problem considered themselves to be recovering or in recovery.*
- *3 in 5 (59.7%) LGB adults who ever had a mental health issue considered themselves to be recovering or in recovery.*
- *Recovery status for both mental health and substance use were higher in the general population than those in the LGB community.*

The following are major themes from the panel:

Support Individuals Through the “Coming Out” Experience

- **Recognize that individuals are self-identifying or coming out as LGBTQI+ at a younger age.** Youth should have supportive systems and role models, particularly if they are too young to understand and navigate the social contexts.

- **Provide support for individuals who face family and/or societal rejection.** An individual can be kicked out of their home, suffer school bullying, experience workplace discrimination, and even face physical violence. Support should include material needs (e.g., housing) as well as counseling and affirming policies.
- **Address internalized shame.** Stigma and rejection are often internalized and reduces a person’s feeling of self-worth. They, in turn, may not feel deserving of support or delay expressing their identity.
- **Elevate this as an equity issue.** The LGBTQI+ community has higher rates of suicide and substance use conditions due to disproportional bullying, discrimination, and trauma.

Provide Culturally Competent and Affirming, Recovery-Based Behavioral Health Care

- **Identify and support peer-run community-based organizations.** Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS) play a vital role in supporting LGBTQI+ individuals in recovery.
- **LGBTQI+ affirming services should be supported by people in recovery.** In addition to cultural humility practices, there should be constant feedback loops where staff can learn how to provide better support and individuals who are being served can safely share insight on their experience.

COMMUNITY CARE IS A HEALING STRATEGY. LEARN FROM HIV CARE INCORPORATING HOLISTIC SERVICES INCLUDING PRIMARY, DENTAL AND SOCIAL CARE NEEDS.

and focus on the resiliency and incorporate cultural healing practices (e.g., Native American’s 2-Spirit¹).

- **Leverage strength-based healing practices.** Acknowledge

- **Provide holistic and whole health, person-centered care for the individual.** This includes addressing **trauma**; providing social connections; supporting safe sexual health practices, a focus on empowerment and being joyful.
- **Address social determinants.** An individual may also need primary care and support with social needs (e.g., food insecurity, housing issues).

¹ <https://www.ihs.gov/lgbt/twospirit/>

- **Provide family services.** This can include family acceptance programs but also support to ex-spouses, children, siblings and other family who are supportive but face societal stigma challenges.
- **Consider spiritual support.** Spirituality and religiosity have been demonstrated to show healing aspects and can support emotional well-being in recovery. However, many LGBTQI+ individuals may have had negative experiences with faith-based institutions.

Review Policies and Practices that Impact Recovery

- **Review legal protections and workplace policies for LGBTQI+ in recovery.** Examples of discrimination include not allowing employees to use their preferred pronouns ; health care coverage (e.g., coverage for medically necessary care to treat gender dysphoria, mental health services, substance use treatment and recovery support services); family leave/bereavement benefits; privacy; and hiring practices.
- **Promote the LGBTQI+ community’s rich history of achievements.** Memorializing and sharing this helps younger generations feel a sense of community, belonging and courage to build upon these successes.

Closer to the problem means closer to the solution!

- **Review quality of data collection.** Qualitative data is also important to understand the stories and experiences of individuals in LGBTQI+ community.
- **Recognize the benefits and risks of social media.** Social media can help in messaging important health information (e.g., PrEP for HIV) and building connections. It is vital to remain vigilant regarding hate speech and bullying on social media.

Address Intersectionality and Sub-Population Concerns

- **Acknowledge and support intersectional identities.** An individual in the LGBTQI+ community who also identifies with other historically marginalized communities needs culturally specific care both in terms of addressing racism, discrimination/microaggressions and leveraging the strength of their community’s healing practices.
- **Meet the unique needs of subpopulations within the LGBTQI+ community.** These include older adults, those who are justice system involved or in foster care; individuals

who are HIV+; veterans; the undocumented; rural communities; individuals with disabilities; climate refugees; individuals with gambling or eating disorders; individuals engaged in medications for addiction treatment (MAT); and individuals with co-occurring disorders.

LGBTQI+ and Recovery Moving Forward

- *LBGTQI+ and Harm Reduction communities have worked hand in hand for many years. Use that experience.*
- *A toolkit on rural community and intersectionality would be helpful.*
- *Support families, ex-spouses, siblings, children, and other families who are supportive but face societal stigma.*
- *Work with groups that may not have a recovery consciousness but focus on the LGBTQI+ community – NO WRONG DOOR.*
- *Focus on issues that have not been addressed as much, e.g., gambling, eating disorders.*
- *Provide support to LGBTQI+ refugees and immigrants.*
- *Support infrastructure and sustainability for recovery support services.*
- *Cultivate leadership.*

Resources

Trainings and Technical Assistance

- [SAMHSA’s LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity Center of Excellence](#)
- SAMHSA’s [Office of Recovery](#)
- [LGBT Recovery/Wellness & Peer Recovery | Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-health Professionals Certification Board \(mabpcb.com\)](#) .
- [Vanessa Goes to the Doctor](#), a short video highlighting the characteristics of affirming care.
- The [21-Day LGBTQ+ Equity Habit Building Challenge](#) (DEI Initiative for Employers)

Resources for finding LGBTQI+ Inclusive Providers

- [SAMHSA FAQs About Finding LGBTQI+ Inclusive Providers](#)
- [NALGAP.org](#) provides vetted behavioral services. They are also working on clinical standards.
- Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ+ Equity provider directory. www.glma.org/find_a_provider.php

Finding Support

- [Faces and Voices in Recovery \(FAVOR\)](#). *FAVOR* supports recovery progress. *It* connects and mobilize millions of diverse faces and voices that represent hope, healing, and lived experience. Through collective efforts in peer partnership, community support, *in* education, *it* advocates for the right of every individual and affected family member to recover from substance use disorder with dignity on the path of their choosing.
- State and Local offices of LGBTQIA2+ Consumer Affairs.

Resources Specific to Subpopulation Groups

- Indian Health Service, [Two-Spirit | Health Resources \(ihs.gov\)](#)

- SAGEConnect which provides services for LGTBQ+ Elders, www.sageusa.org
- Training and education on 2spirited Native Americans, www.nativeamerican2spiritsacredcircle.com
- True Colors United, an organization dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ youth, www.truecolors.org
- Sonder Recovery which is a free LGBTQI+ led virtual recovery community organization, www.sonderrecovery.org