

What do LGBTQI+ Inclusive Substance Use Services look like?



Research shows that the LGBTQI+ community experiences health inequalities and disproportionate harms around substance use (alcohol, drugs, smoking).

This resource is a brief guide for any substance use organisation or service on how to ensure that you are as LGBTQI+ inclusive as possible.

Staff are trained in LGBTQI+ awareness

In order to ensure that your services are inclusive and acceptable to LGBTQI+ people, making sure your staff have a good understanding of LGBTQI+ lives and experiences is crucial. It means that when LGBTQI+ people access your services, they can feel confident that you will have some understanding of their unique experiences - meaning they don't feel like they have to explain basics to you before you can work together on whatever they're presenting with.

It is especially recommended that your service receives specific training in transgender awareness.

Public facing environments (physical and online) are proactively LGBTQI+ inclusive

Think about how clients first encounter your service, be that in physical locations such as an office, or online via email, websites or social media. Are there any obvious signs that your service is LGBTQI+ inclusive? If not, consider how you might add some. Examples might include:

- displaying a Pride flag in your reception area;
- adding preferred pronouns to your email signature;
- having a page on your website dedicated to LGBTQI+ communities
- displaying LGBTQI+ banners on social media/websites around LGBTQI+ awareness months/days
- if you're running groups or meetings (not just LGBTQI+ specific groups/meetings), ask people to give their preferred pronouns
- put out messaging, resources, articles, social media posts specifically aimed at the LGBTQI+ community

If you want to save yourself some time and work, the [kinderstrongerbetter.org](https://www.kinderstrongerbetter.org) website is a ready made one stop shop for information on LGBTQI+ substance use.

The #KinderStrongerBetter website has been co-produced by members of the LGBTQI community. Whilst the website was created with a focus on support services in Glasgow, it does link to many useful websites and services available to LGBTQI people across Scotland. It also contains a huge array of useful information, research, videos and more on LGBTQI substance use health inequalities. A very useful resource for members of the LGBTQI community and professionals working with the community both.

Published resources are LGBTQI+ inclusive

Most organisations will have published resources whether these are flyers, leaflets, posters - physical or online - and websites. Do you have any resources which refer to LGBTQI+ people? Is the language inclusive? Are the images you use representative of different communities, including LGBTQI+ people? Have you thought about co-producing resources with the LGBTQI+ community?

Services are designed with the needs of LGBTQI+ people in mind

Good practice for ensuring that services you provide are LGBTQI+ inclusive is to involve the community. This could be as simple as conducting surveys with LGBTQI+ people, consulting LGBTQI+ services, inviting LGBTQI+ people onto service design groups, organisational boards or setting up an LGBTQI+ peer involvement group in your locality.

Proactively connected with your local LGBTQI+ community and/or LGBTQI+ organisations

LGBTQI+ people and organisations are the best sources of knowledge and expertise for helping you to design appropriate services and ensure that you are an inclusive organisation. Building relationships with community organisations or members is a great way to make LGBTQI+ people feel comfortable accessing your services. It also provides an opportunity for learning for LGBTQI+ organisations and community members on substance use and harm reduction!

You have discussed with the LGBTQI+ community what (if any) specific services they would like

Your organisation may run or host many services. Perhaps you run or host groups for different populations - e.g. women's groups. Are all of your groups inclusive and acceptable to LGBTQI+ people or would a dedicated 'safe space' be better? You could always ask the LGBTQI+ community.

Effective equalities monitoring and evaluation procedures in place

We all want our services to be inclusive. Do you know how many LGBTQI+ people have accessed your services over the past year? You probably already collect some equality monitoring information from service users. Add in questions on sexuality and gender identity and collect this data. If we don't know how many LGBTQI+ people are accessing alcohol/drug services, it makes it more difficult understand the needs of the populations you serve. Collecting this information and reporting it to local, regional or national strategic organisations will also help us build a better picture of levels of need.

Do you know or are you able to ask how LGBTQI+ people experience your service? If you're going to make some changes to make your service more inclusive, it might be useful to have a baseline so that you know if these changes have or are making a positive difference to how LGBTQI+ people experience your services. It'll be hard to do any of this if you don't even know whether LGBTQI+ people are accessing your service - which is among the reasons why it's important to do this!

Knowing the people in your service can be a first step to refining its delivery for them. Inclusive services often have ways of gathering feedback on service delivery and including diverse groups in the design and refinement of services.

References

This resource and the tips for LGBTQI+ inclusive substance use services has been produced with reference to research that has underpinned the work of the Glasgow LGBTQI Substance Use Partnership, as well as feedback from the LGBTQI+ community garnered from the 2021 LGBTQI Substance Use Community Champions project.

In particular, we have drawn from the following pieces of research:

- [The Social Context of LGBT people's drinking in Scotland - Emslie et al \(2015\)](#).
- [Transgender Inclusion in Drug and Alcohol Services - Transgender Alliance & North Ayrshire ADP \(2016\)](#).
- [Health needs assessment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and non-binary people - Leven \(2020\), prepared for NHS GGC & NHS Lothian](#)

You can find a comprehensive list of research pieces on LGBTQI+ substance use and health inequalities at kinderstrongerbetter.org/research-index/

Other useful links and resources

The Equality Network has a host of useful resources on how best to engage with the LGBTQI+ community, including on how to make services more inclusive and acceptable.

You can find these resources at: www.equality-network.org/resources/publications/

The Scottish Transgender Alliance has an excellent resource on equalities monitoring available at: https://www.scottishtrans.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/06/getting_equalities_monitoring_right.pdf

LGBT Youth Scotland LGBT Charter

The LGBT Charter is a straightforward programme that enables your organisation or school to proactively include LGBTI people in every aspect of your work, protecting your staff and providing a high quality service to your customers, students or service users.

Find out more at: www.lgbtyouth.org.uk/the-lgbt-charter/

Looking for ideas?

Some alcohol and drug organisations/services have already created resources or webpages for the LGBTQI+ community. You might find these useful in drawing inspiration for your own.

See examples from Alcohol Change UK at: alcoholchange.org.uk/blog/2021/resources-for-lgbtqia-people

Visit the Glasgow Council on Alcohol's LGBTQI+ community page at: www.glasgowcouncilonalcohol.org/alcohol-and-the-lgbti-community/