

Epidemiology of elevated alcohol use and probable alcohol use disorder among LGBTQ+ youth in Australia

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Introduction: International literature suggests elevated alcohol use among LGBTQ+ individuals compared to their cisgender, heterosexual peers. However, current Australian scholarship focuses on LGBTQ+ adults and recent alcohol use irrespective of duration/intensity with little consideration of support-seeking experiences. This study aimed to (i) estimate the prevalence of alcohol use severity among LGBTQ+ youth, and (ii) identify support seeking engagement and preferences among those with identified elevated alcohol use (EAU) or probable alcohol use disorder (AUD).

Methods: We drew data from the 2019 Writing Themselves In 4 study, the largest cross-sectional study of health and well-being among LGBTQ+ youth in Australia aged 14-21 years (N=6,418; M_{age}=17.3). Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT-C) cut-off scores were used to determine EAU (≥ 3) and AUD (≥ 6). Associations between EAU/AUD and demographics, mental health, and support seeking engagement were tested using multivariate logistic regression models.

Key Findings: Both EAU (39.3%, n=2,505) and AUD (13.9%, n=882) were marked within this sample. Increased odds of EAU and AUD were observed among youth who were 18+, gay, queer, recently employed, had experienced homelessness, were a current regular smoker, and/or reported recent self-harm/suicide attempt/s. Youth with EAU reported higher odds of ever accessing telephone-based support services. Youth with probable AUD reported lower odds of ever accessing any support services, particularly those in-person, and higher odds of never accessing any professional support, compared with youth without AUD. Youth with EAU and AUD expressed a preference for LGBTQ+ inclusive mainstream drug support services.

Discussion and Conclusions: EAU and AUD are prevalent among Australian LGBTQ+ youth. There is a priority to engage LGBTQ+ youth with probable AUD in LGBTQ+ inclusive support services. Upskilling telephone-based support services to address substance use concerns in an LGBTQ+ affirmative, age-appropriate manner represents a pragmatic public health response.

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