

Understanding and improving trans peoples' experiences of seeking and receiving meaningful support in relation to their own alcohol and/or other drug use: a participatory research project

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Introduction: Some trans peoples' AOD consumption is positive, facilitating social/community connection, self-exploration, self-rejuvenation. Notwithstanding, many trans people with AOD concerns do not seek support.

Methods: Led by trans AOD clinician/researchers, supported by cis-ally AOD clinicians/researchers and iterative consultation with trans AOD peer workers/researchers, a national online cross-sectional survey comprising fixed-option and free-text response items assessing propensities, barriers, past experiences and perceived utility of seeking AOD support from 26 formal (e.g., inpatient/outpatient, '12-steps'), informal (e.g., friend/s, partner/s), digital (e.g., social media, phone-helpline) sources was open April-July 2025. Qualitative survey items were supplemented with two interviews and one focus group with 5 trans people, eliciting trans peoples' recommendations for developing trans-affirming harm reduction messaging.

Results: Among 114 trans people ($M_{age}=32.9$), AOD support was most commonly sought from friend/s (48%), partner/s (19%), internet searches (17%). Though friends tended to be useful, experiences of support-seeking from partner/s and internet searches varied significantly. Hesitations toward AOD support-seeking stemmed predominantly from fears of having one's AOD experiences misunderstood(40%), judgement from loved ones (38%), pressure to change one's AOD use (29%) fear of losing connected with friend/s or community/ies (23%). Qualitative responses discussed navigating tensions of managing AOD use expectations of friend/s, partner/s, community settings, retaining social connectedness and avoiding isolation, while acknowledging the 'downside' potential of AOD use and making sure you are using AOD for the right reasons.

Discussions and Conclusions: Trans people seek AOD support from informal (e.g., friends, partner(s) and online sources over mainstream formal services, for better (e.g. reduced social isolation) or for worst (e.g., lack of explicit support for reducing AOD use).

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: Accounting for the nuanced role of friends, partner(s), and community settings in the lives of trans people is key to improving trans-affirming harm reduction.

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