

Characteristics and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that access AOD treatment. What story is the data telling?

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Introduction: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples comprise 27% of people accessing alcohol and other drugs (AOD) treatment through non-government organisation (NGO) services. Using routinely collected NADAbase data, this study aimed to examine characteristics and outcomes. Focus groups with Aboriginal people were used to recognise that data tells stories that shape understanding and service improvement.

Method: A mixed methods approach integrated quantitative and qualitative data. Analysis of NADAbase data from 227 NGO AOD services in NSW between 2022- 2025. Findings were shared with Aboriginal AOD workers and organisations to validate and strengthen analysis. Centring voices and lived experiences through storytelling, a core part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, added vital context and strengthened interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Key Findings: Preliminary data analysis shows that while there are differences in the characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to other people that access AOD treatment (by age, substance use, main treatment accessed and treatment outcomes (completed vs others) ($p < 0.05$), the health outcomes of treatment did not greatly differ in terms of psychological health, quality of life and substance dependence domains.

Discussions and Conclusions: This research was undertaken in collaboration with an Aboriginal-led Reference Group, drawing on the knowledge of the Aboriginal AOD workforce and ACCO member services to improve understanding of NADAbase data. Aboriginal-led approaches to data analysis must be embedded in the AOD sector.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: This data can be used to inform policy and service planning to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Further, qualitative data show that culturally appropriate data collection tools must be embedded to accurately represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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