

LGBTQI+SB SMART Recovery - Creating a Safe Recovery Space

Authors:

Mike Winton¹ April Long²

¹General Manager, Palmerston Association, ²CEO, SMART Recovery Australia

Presenter emails: mwinton@palmerston.org.au, along@srau.org.au

Background:

Addiction is not a moral failing, but a human experience shaped by trauma, environment, social context, and opportunity. Reframing addiction in this way reduces stigma and creates safer pathways into support and recovery. Despite national best-practice frameworks promoting trauma-informed, person-centred, and culturally safe alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment, many LGBTQI+SB people continue to anticipate or experience discrimination in mainstream services. This contributes to delayed help-seeking, reduced engagement, and poorer treatment outcomes, despite recognised higher rates of AOD use within rainbow communities.

Description of Model of Care/Intervention:

Palmerston Association, the first AOD service in Western Australia accredited under the Rainbow Tick Standards, partnered with SMART Recovery Australia to deliver LGBTQI+SB-specific virtual SMART Recovery meetings in Boorloo (Perth), Western Australia. The program combines peer-led facilitation centres lived and living experience. Grounded in group agreements promoting psychological safety, confidentiality, and zero tolerance for discrimination, the model provides practical recovery tools alongside social connection and warm referrals to wraparound supports. Delivered by LGBTQI+SB community members for the community, the virtual format strengthens accessibility, identity safety, and cultural relevance while reaching participants locally, nationally, and internationally. External specialist clinical supervision supports facilitators and complex presentations.

Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:

Since commencement, more than 170 participants have engaged with the program, with over half attending regularly as part of ongoing recovery maintenance and community connection. Feedback consistently highlights increased safety, empowerment, belonging, and the opportunity to openly discuss experiences such as Chemsex and navigating LGBTQI+ social networking spaces.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

This LGBTQI+SB-peer-led mutual support model demonstrates that identity-safe, low-barrier approaches are both feasible and effective within AOD settings, strengthening engagement, retention, and pathways into broader care.

Nationally SMART Recovery Australia runs 9 LBTIQA+ meetings, the majority of these are volunteer-led and provides an opportunity to embed LBTIQA+ more formally in the service ecosystem/system.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None declared.