

Some same sex attracted women avoid treatment for alcohol problems

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A new study has investigated alcohol issues faced by same sex attracted women.
Credit: University of Melbourne

Same sex attracted women (SSAW) have higher alcohol and mental health problem rates than heterosexual women but many do not access or

are not satisfied with treatment, a University of Melbourne-led study has found.

Published in the UK Royal College of General Practitioners' journal *BJGP Open*, the study involved researchers from the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Columbia University, Royal Melbourne Hospital and Monash University.

The study of 521 Australian SSAW found that 70 per cent of those aged 18-25 reported problematic [alcohol](#) use that exceeded [national guidelines](#), but only six per cent accessed [treatment](#). Overall, only 41.1 per cent of participants who needed mental health and alcohol treatment had used it.

The research found significant service access barriers included not feeling ready for help and previous negative experiences related to [sexual identity](#).

It found enablers included having a regular GP, sexuality disclosure to the GP and LGBTIQ community connectedness. Intimate partner violence was also associated with increased access to services for mental health and alcohol issues.

Chief investigator and University of Melbourne Honorary Professor Ruth McNair said some SSAW [women](#) were reluctant to seek professional help as they worried about being discriminated against or not being taken seriously.

However, she said GPs were generally capable and interested in helping them and a supportive GP was a must.

"It's even more important for people who have suffered some discrimination and that's one of the underlying reasons for their drug or alcohol use," Professor McNair said.

Professor McNair said organisations such as the Australian Lesbian Medical Association via the Doclist and the Victorian AIDS Council could help to find LGBTIQ friendly health professionals.

She said it was important for health professionals to be aware of LGBTIQ issues and encourage patients to feel comfortable discussing them. "It often doesn't come up," she says.

The study also found that social support for SSAW women was associated with a reduction in treatment use. This meant those who felt they had a strong social support network were less likely to seek help.

"SSAW are consistently less likely than [heterosexual women](#) to use alcohol treatment services, despite reporting more problematic drinking," the study found. "Bisexual and 'mainly heterosexual' women demonstrate even higher risk than lesbian women.

"Disclosing sexual identity to a regular, trusted GP correlated with improved utilisation of alcohol and [mental health](#) treatment for SSAW. The benefits of seeking help for alcohol use, and of accessing LGBT-inclusive GPs to do so, should be promoted to SSAW."

More information: Ruth McNair et al. Health service use by same-sex attracted Australian women for alcohol and mental health issues: a cross-sectional study, *BJGP Open* (2018). [DOI: 10.3399/bjgpopen18X101565](https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgpopen18X101565)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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