

Low rates of people with alcohol use disorder are having 'helpful' treatment

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Results from World Mental Health Surveys have found fewer than half of the people with alcohol use disorder who sought treatment perceived their treatment as being helpful.

Using [survey data](#) from the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 24

countries, researchers from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC), UNSW Sydney, found that of the 9,378 people with lifetime [alcohol use disorder](#), one in eight (11.8 percent) reported ever obtaining treatment for the disorder. Of these, just under half (44 percent) reported that treatment was helpful.

Ms Chrianna Bharat, Research Associate at NDARC, said, "This level of perceived helpfulness was far lower for alcohol use disorders than for others like [mental health disorders](#)."

"The reasons for these differences are likely manifold. In comparison to treatment for mental disorders, treatment for substance use disorders is often far less well resourced. There are also significant issues around stigma and accessibility of treatment for [substance use disorders](#) that are likely far greater than those for mental disorders."

Probability of obtaining helpful treatment from the first professional seen was around one in five (21.8 percent) responders.

"In the face of ongoing unhelpful treatment and as the number of professionals seen by the responders increased, the likelihood that the next treatment would be helpful tended to decrease," said Ms Bharat.

The study also found that persisting in seeking treatment, despite having received unhelpful treatment, was important in increasing the likelihood of receiving helpful treatment.

"Among those who sought help from up to seven [health professionals](#), 79.7 percent would receive helpful treatment. However, only 13.2 percent of those ever-seeking treatment persisted in seeing up to seven professionals," said Ms Bharat.

People with alcohol use disorder in low and middle-income countries

were only half as likely to obtain helpful treatment as those in high-income countries.

"Quality improvement initiatives, such as adoption of the evidence-based WHO mental health gap action program (mhGAP) Intervention Guide and the work of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and WHO in improving treatment quality in low- and [middle-income countries](#) could be helpful in this regard," said Ms Bharat.

"Future research should examine how to increase the likelihood that alcohol use disorder treatment is found to be helpful on any given contact."

More information: Louisa Degenhardt et al, Perceived helpfulness of treatment for alcohol use disorders: Findings from the World Mental Health Surveys, *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.109158](#)

Provided by National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC)

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