



Contribution of drug and alcohol use to pathways in and out of homelessness for LGBTI people in Victoria

Dr Cal Andrews
A/Prof Ruth McNair

lgbtihomeless.com | [@GALFAhomeless](https://twitter.com/GALFAhomeless)



FACULTY OF
MEDICINE,
DENTISTRY
& HEALTH
SCIENCES



Outline

- Project aims
- Rationale
- Methods
- Complex role of AOD in:
 - Compounding pathways into homelessness
 - Constraining pathways out of homelessness
- Summary and next steps

Project aims

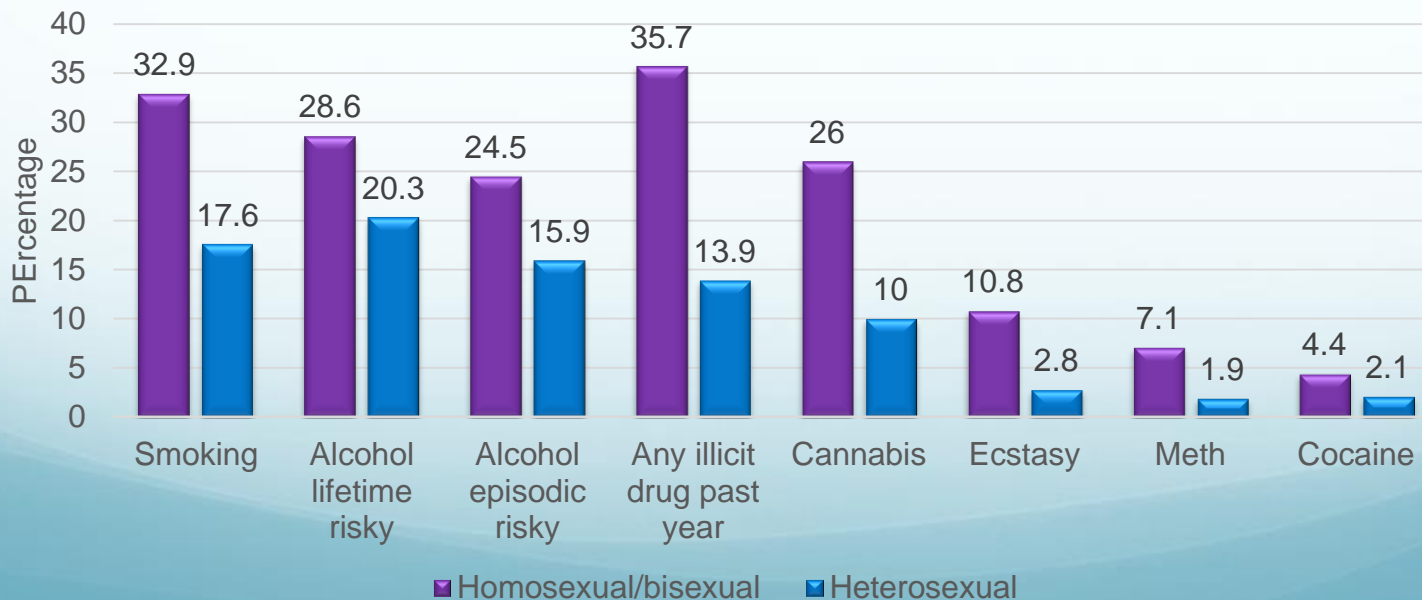
- Initiated and coordinated by the Gay and Lesbian Foundation of Australia (galfa.org.au)
- General project aims:
 - **Identify contributors and pathways**
 - **Investigate experiences of service provision**
 - **Look at current practice and best practice for LGBTI**
 - **Make the project findings available to influence policy initiatives, services, and training.**

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Rationale

- LGBT and homelessness:
 - Increasing evidence of over-representation and heightened risks
 - More likely to leave home at an early age, experience childhood abuse, and have multiple episodes of homelessness
 - Limitations of current research and responses in Australia
- LGBT and substance use: 26,648 Australians surveyed in 2010*

National Household Drug Survey comparing homosexual/bisexual with heterosexual people



Substance use – subgroup differences*

- Smoking – higher among
 - Bisexual men and bisexual women
 - Lesbians compared with gay men
 - Trans people**
- Alcohol use - higher among
 - Lesbian women and bisexual women
- Illicit drugs
 - Gay and bisexual men are more likely to use stimulants and inhalants than other LGBT people
 - Bisexual women are more likely to use cannabis and report having injected drugs

*National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre literature review, 2012

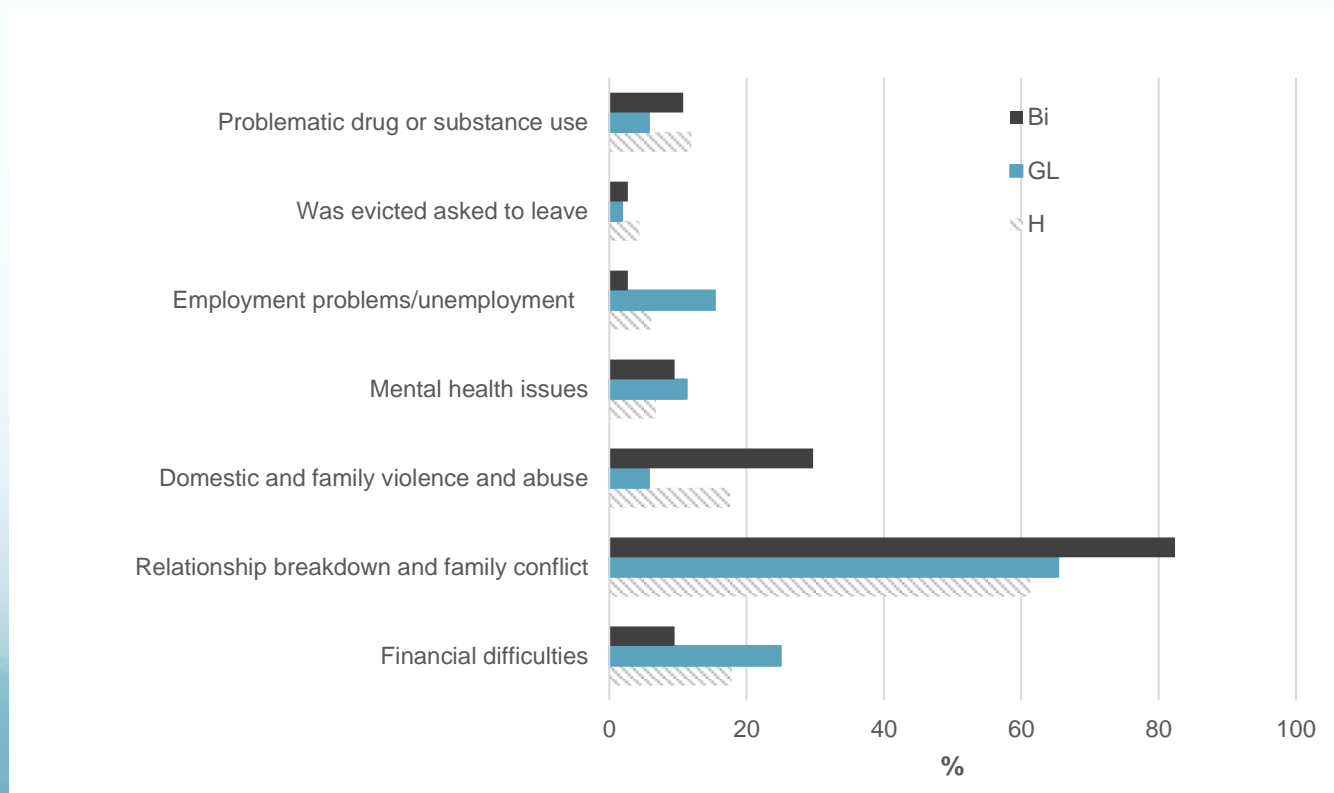
** There is no Australian population-based AOD prevalence data for trans and gender diverse people

Methods

- Mixed-methods
 - **Descriptive analysis: Journeys Home survey (Swinburne)**
 - **Semi-structured interviews with staff at service providers in Victoria (University of Melbourne)**
 - Service 1: has specific response for LGBTI youth
 - Service 2: faith-based, inner city
 - Service 3: faith-based, rural, has LGBTI-specific youth group
 - Service 4: inner city mainstream service
 - **Semi-structured interviews with LGBTI people who have experienced homelessness in Victoria**
- Some limitations...

Pathways into homelessness for LGBT

- Reasons for becoming homeless (JH wave 1 data): LGB people were more likely to report relationship breakdown and family conflict and/or family violence compared to heterosexual.



Coming out, family conflict and substance abuse

“parents or carers not being terribly supportive when they have come out... I would say that is probably at the heart of most of the young people who are LGBTI who become homeless or at risk of homelessness” (service 3)

“The first time I became homeless was when I was a teenager and I squatted. That was because I couldn't stay at my home, at my family home. I didn't - I had a break-down and that was to do with my sexuality at the time, which I didn't completely understand”

(transwoman, unspecified age)

“A big one for her [female trans client] was her lack of family support. And then general lack of community support as well, which then transpired into substance misuse... ice was the main one, and then she got like HIV and it was just this big sort of isolated situation, and then using ice on top of that she was homeless then. She was couch surfing with people, and then they asked her to leave because she had HIV” (service 4)

“So a dysfunctional family may not in and of itself lead to homelessness. Drug and alcohol may not lead. Poverty, discrimination in the workplace, they may not lead to homelessness, but all of a sudden you put them together...And that’s when I think people get raised right up into that risk category” (service 2)

Trauma and mental health

“Also the amount of people I've met, sort of queer and trans people with complex PTSD because of family abuse, or institutionalised abuse of schools and orphanages and stuff. It's a much higher chance of homelessness because of the trauma, and the associated depression and anxiety makes getting into houses and keeping housing so much more difficult, and employment as well, and school”

(transgender woman, age 40)

“People taking substances to mute the pain. I myself used to be - I spent over 10 years taking drugs. Started when I was 13. Yeah, just unable to deal with the trauma and who I was and society's reaction to that. Just trying to mute my pain”
(transwoman, age 40)

Pathways out of homelessness for LGBT

- **Transitional houses:** can have strict policies on D&A
- **Rooming houses:** drug use, discrimination, violence
- **Private rental market...**

“Pathways out of homelessness are by and large your ability to compete in a marketised housing system... in the private rental market” (service 2)

“Drug use is one of the big things that impacts a young person’s ability to move out of that kind of cycle, I mean the use of money and resources, and impact on decision-making, and just the general presentation, you know, in terms of looking for housing options and stuff. It has such a huge impact” (service 2)

Additional discrimination in rental market

“A young M to F went in as M to F, and the reception was not well, didn’t even get to fill out the forms, nothing like that. Went back as M, got to fill forms out” (service 3)

“They might not necessarily have negative views about a trans person within a sharehouse with them, but they might be so terrified of doing or saying the wrong thing, or their friends come around and that it’s easier to just choose somebody else to just move into this sharehouse” (service 1)

Summary: Contribution of drug and alcohol use to pathways in and out of homelessness for LGBT

- Regular drug use and higher rates of illegal drug use compared to the heterosexual homeless population
- Other specific risk factors for LGBT: childhood trauma, PTSD, anxiety, financial stress, and discrimination
- Substance abuse is a major impediment to exiting homelessness
- LGBT experience additional discrimination/barriers in accessing services and the private rental market
- Higher risk, fewer options, and additional challenges for LGBT who are experiencing homelessness

What next?

- Need for more targeted research and service provision
- Best practice guidelines for housing and homelessness services on LGBTI inclusive practice (Victoria)
- Specific resources/model of care and evaluation specifically to support trans and gender diverse (Victoria)
- Pilot and evaluate a state-wide LGBTI safe housing network to help find safe, sustainable accommodation, build social connections, and access support (Victoria)
- Australia-wide survey of homelessness services and clients regarding their perceptions of and responsiveness to LGBTI

Thank you



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lgbtihomeless.com | [@GALFAhomeless](https://twitter.com/GALFAhomeless)

drcmandrews@gmail.com