# The meth crisis in the gay community



The ongoing opioid crisis in the United States has recently been overshadowed by another pressing issue: the rising prevalence of methamphetamine addiction, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community. The significant role that meth plays in these communities requires urgent attention, particularly as November 30 marks National Methamphetamine Awareness Day.

Data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for 2020 and 2021 reveals alarming statistics. Sexual minorities—defined as gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals—are at least twice as likely to engage in stimulant use compared to their heterosexual counterparts. Notably, gay men are over four times more likely to have used meth within the past year.

Karah Moody, a mental health counsellor and the LGBTQ+ programme coordinator at the River Oaks Treatment Center in South Florida, has observed the severe impacts of meth addiction among these populations first-hand. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, individuals from sexual minority backgrounds often enter treatment with more severe drug use disorders than heterosexual individuals. Moody attributes this trend to several compounding factors, including discrimination, stigma, and trauma experienced in their lives.

For many in the LGBTQ+ community, the feeling of having their needs invalidated fosters unhealthy coping mechanisms, including substance use. Experiences of discrimination make spaces feel unsafe, leading many to seek refuge in environments such as gay bars, where substance use may be normalised. Methamphetamine is often present in club settings, as its effects—euphoria and increased libido—appeal to party-goers. Unfortunately, what typically starts as a voluntary engagement can lead to addiction, creating an ingrained habit difficult to break.

The addictive nature of methamphetamine alters brain chemistry, associating certain social environments—such as chosen family and friendship circles—with drug use, which poses significant challenges for recovery. The prospect of quitting may evoke fears regarding the ability to enjoy sex and social gatherings without the drug. Recovery from chronic meth use can involve a lengthy process of re-establishing normal brain function, as the drug significantly affects the dopamine system associated with pleasure and motivation.

The withdrawal process from meth can be particularly complex, often marked by intense paranoia and mistrust, which complicates the therapeutic relationship vital for recovery. Many LGBTQ+ individuals have faced historical trauma and stigma within treatment settings, which can lead to hesitancy in seeking help. They often come from families that may not provide adequate support, further isolating them during recovery.

There is an increasing call for specialised addiction treatment programmes that cater to the specific needs and experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals. It is crucial for treatment centres to create an environment where sexual and gender minorities feel safe, valued, and understood, free from discrimination or harassment.

To this effect, therapeutic approaches such as Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) are being implemented in many treatment programmes. Originally designed for individuals with borderline personality disorder, DBT has been adapted to support those struggling with emotional regulation and substance use disorders. The approach reinforces skills such as mindfulness, emotional management, and distress tolerance, which are essential during early recovery stages.

Nationally, addressing the growing grip of meth on LGBTQ+ communities requires a comprehensive approach. Alongside addiction treatment, the need for sober, supportive environments for these individuals remains pressing. After treatment, many individuals find themselves in precarious situations, desperately needing sober friendships and support networks. The establishment of substance-free community centres could serve as a viable model to help individuals reintegrate into society and foster a sense of belonging.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline> - Highlights the importance of safe and supportive treatment environments for LGBTQ+ individuals, as emphasized by SAMHSA.
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* <https://www.healthline.com/health/methamphetamine-addiction> - Details the addictive nature of methamphetamine, its effects on brain chemistry, and the challenges associated with recovery.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6834355/> - Supports the discussion on the historical trauma and stigma faced by LGBTQ+ individuals within treatment settings and its impact on seeking help.