

► Change will come if we stand together, face the problem, and do what it takes to heal ourselves...and each other.



In the past, gay and bisexual men and women encountered problems when seeking treatment at some agencies.

In many cases, counselors were not sympathetic to, or even knowledgeable about, gender issues. Some would even go so far as attempting to “cure” a client’s homosexuality, falsely believing that, somehow, gayness itself is the root of excessive alcohol use.

Today the situation has improved in clinics where treatment staff has received training in the special issues confronting gay, bisexual, and transgendered men and women.

More clinics, for example, now include a client’s lover in treatment groups for relatives. Previously, only husbands and wives may have been invited.

Another option is all-gay meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous and other 12-step groups.

The first AA meeting for gays was held more than a decade ago, and today there are more than 300 gay AA groups throughout the world.

To meet the special needs of friends and lovers of recovering gay alcoholics and abusers, special gay Al-Anon support groups have also been formed.

Alcoholics Together (AT), a similar self-help organization, also has meetings in various locations. For women, there are meetings of Women for Sobriety, and other self-help groups.

Any of the groups and resources mentioned above and listed in the “Making *Your Move*: Start Where You Are” box inside can help.

But *none* work if the people who need them don’t use them.

► Follow Through

In recent years we’ve all noticed an increased awareness of alcoholism and other forms of chemical dependency in the LGBT community. This awareness has served to improve programs and focus attention on ways to reduce alcohol’s terrible toll.



Things are better, but there’s still room for improvement.

Because when everything else is said and done, real change will only come when we stand together, face the problem, and do what it takes to heal ourselves and each other.



That may mean not settling for chemical dependency for ourselves, our lovers, and our

friends.

It may also mean taking on the challenge of actively supporting LGBT services in our communities and seeing to it that people who need those services are aware of them and receive them.

But most of all it means telling the truth—both about the problem and potential solutions—to ourselves and the people we care about most.

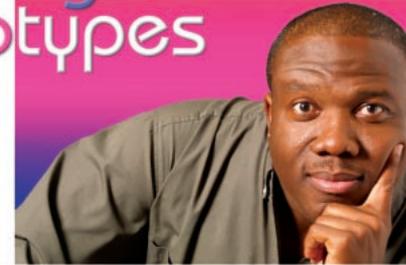
It’s a big job, but it needs doing. We owe it to ourselves to see that it gets done, once and for all. ■



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stopping stereotypes



problem drinking & alcoholism
in the **lgbt** community

► a do it now publication by danielle hain

► Critical Problem/Critical Proportions

being a gay man or lesbian in this country never *has* been easy. In the past, it's meant facing down alienation, isolation, and oppression. Today, it also means coming to grips with our own feelings of being so *out* of the closet—and so *in* the public eye. ("Ellen" and "Queer Eye" *are* must-see TV for millions of straight viewers, too.)

Then mix in the stresses of the continuing clash over who we are and why and an updated version of old-fashioned homophobia linked to fears of AIDS and same-sex marriage, and you realize that life's not always a picnic now, either.



For many of us, staying in the closet can seem the safest way to avoid both rejection—from co-workers, friends, and family—and conflict.

But even those who freely express their gayness find that it's virtually impossible to avoid society's negative attitudes.

The result can be **major** stress. And stress is a main reason so many gay men and women look for escape in a bottle—or in a line of cocaine or a pipe loaded with crystal meth.

A look at the numbers can put things into sharper perspective. Studies show that at least two million gay men and lesbians abuse alcohol and as many as 30 percent of us will need chemical-dependency treatment at some point in our lives—three times the odds facing the general population.

Clearly, problem drinking and alcoholism is a critical problem in critical proportions for gay people. Luckily, it's also a problem that can be alleviated with the simplest tools of all—honest information and simple compassion.

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► Them & Us

Many aspects of gay life contribute to the high rate of gay/lesbian alcoholism. But a main factor remains the fear and hatred focused on gay people.

Needless to say, society has never approved of same-sex romance, and the cumulative stress takes its toll in varying degrees, depending on the individual. Still, that's not the *only* factor involved in today's epidemic.

It's a simple fact that alcohol **is** a focus of many gay and lesbian social gatherings. In many communities, gay bars are the focus of most social activities.

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And while treatment professionals differ in their opinions on the degree to which bars actually con-

tribute to the high rate of alcoholism among gays, no one denies the importance of bars in gay social life.

But regardless of how you come by a problem with alcohol or drugs, once you get it, you've got it. Then you need help to get rid of it.

► Getting Help

There are a variety of chemical dependency treatment options for gay persons, but what's available in your area depends very much on where you live.

In New York, San Francisco, or L.A., gay/lesbian treatment programs are relatively easy to find because of their large gay populations.

Some programs there and elsewhere are run by gays, while others have gay or lesbian counselors on staff, and still others train straight counselors in helping gay clients.

Making Your Move: Start Where You Are

If someone you care about has a drinking problem, *their* next move could very well depend on yours. If you need help in sorting out your options—or you need help with your **own** drinking or drug problem—get in touch with a treatment professional—gay **or** straight—or self-help group in your area.

Don't know where to start? Start where you are **right now**:

- The National Association of Lesbian & Gay Alcoholism Professionals, 1208 East State Boulevard, Fort Wayne, IN 46805. NALGAP also provides information on programs specializing in treatment of gay men and lesbian alcoholics.
- Gay AA groups can be located through the local AA Intergroup Office listed in the white pages of the phone book or by writing to the General Services Office, Alcoholics Anonymous, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10017.

Counseling and treatment services can be obtained at various local agencies. Gay service directories and local gay hotlines also list resources and can make appropriate referrals. ■

