

SoBar – Not So Straight Up evaluation report

SoBar – Not So Straight Up aims to reduce alcohol-related harm within LGBTIQ+ communities in the ACT. It focuses on increasing awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful alcohol use, changing social norms influencing risky drinking behaviour and alcohol culture, and supporting access to suitable treatment and self-help options. The evaluation of the SoBar – Not So Straight Up program was conducted in two parts: a process evaluation assessing the quality of activities delivered and an impact evaluation assessing the impact of the activities.

The process evaluation found:

- SoBar – Not So Straight Up has reached 8790 people through its online campaign, and 200 people in its SoBar pop-up stall at CBR Fair Day 2019, exceeding the target of 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population.
- The program undertook a number of strategies to ensure that information provided by the campaign was relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities. This included undertaking research to understand LGBTIQ+ people's experiences, knowledge and behaviours around alcohol consumption and convening a reference group of LGBTIQ+ people to inform project activities.
- The program delivered LGBTIQ+ alcohol and other drugs (AOD) awareness training to 17 organisations from the AOD sector. The training was highly relevant to participants: 91% (n=43) rated the training as relevant or very relevant to their needs.
- The program delivered 34 SMART Sessions to five people, all of whom are members of the LGBTIQ+ community. SMART Sessions were high quality: 100% of respondents (n=3) rated their experience as good or excellent and 100% (n=3) were satisfied or very satisfied with support provided by the facilitator.

The impact evaluation found:

- The campaign was highly effective at reaching LGBTIQ+ people with messaging that challenges social norms around alcohol within LGBTIQ+ communities, raises awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful drinking and promotes strategies for addressing risky drinking behaviour.
- The program increased LGBTIQ+ people's access to resources through the development and distribution of resources and information through its social media and website presence and through educating people through SMART Sessions.
- The LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training was effective in supporting services to offer inclusive services to LGBTIQ+ people: 95% (n=43) of training participants think the training will contribute a great deal or a lot to their service being more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people.
- SMART Sessions were effective at increasing clients' access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues: 100% of clients at SMART Sessions improved their access to information, services and support and 100% had more information and support as a result of using the service.

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Executive summary

Program description

In October 2019, the ACT Health Promotion Grants Program funded Meridian (then called the AIDS Action Council of the ACT) to deliver the program SoBar – Not So Straight Up. SoBar – Not So Straight Up aims to reduce alcohol-related harm within LGBTIQ+ communities in the ACT. It focuses on increasing awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful alcohol use, changing the social norms influencing risky drinking and alcohol culture, and supporting access to suitable treatment and self-help options.

The program has four objectives:

1. Approximately 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population are exposed to tailored messaging that challenges social norms around alcohol within LGBTIQ+ communities, raises awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful drinking and promotes strategies for addressing risky drinking behaviour (referred to in this report as the campaign).
2. LGBTIQ+ people in the ACT and region have increased access to information resources that address the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking (referred to as resources).
3. Key alcohol and other drug (AOD) services and alcohol related treatment health professionals in the ACT have the information and tools to provide more inclusive services to LGBTIQ+ people (referred to as AOD training).
4. LGBTIQ+ people have increased access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues (referred to as inclusive services).

The program objectives were achieved through the following activities:

SoBar campaign: The campaign was originally conceived of as a bar serving non-alcoholic drinks (a sober bar) that would feature at community events. It appeared at CBR Fair Day 2019, however as no events were able to run in 2020 due to COVID-19, SoBar shifted into an online campaign.

Developing and sharing resources: The program developed and shared information and resources that address the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking. This included developing three research surveys and holding reference group and consultation meetings with LGBTIQ+ people to build the evidence base on knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of drinking of LGBTIQ+ communities in the ACT.

AOD training: The program delivered training to 17 organisations in the ACT offering alcohol and drug treatment or counselling.

SMART Sessions: The program delivered weekly Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) Sessions for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans to address any risky drinking behaviour they may have been experiencing.

Evaluation findings

The SoBar – Not So Straight Up program was evaluated by Collective Action – a social impact consultancy. The evaluation of the program was conducted in two parts: a process evaluation assessing the quality of activities delivered and an impact evaluation assessing the impact of the activities. The findings of the evaluation are detailed below.

Process evaluation

SoBar – Not So Straight Up has completed its planned activities, meeting or exceeding strategic targets under each objective, with the exception of the SMART Sessions, which only engaged five people rather than the 20 planned. The delivery of SoBar was moved to an online campaign to respond to social distancing requirements put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. AOD training was also conducted in a split format both online and face-to-face.

The SoBar campaign

Is the campaign reaching target audiences?

Social media and website metrics show that SoBar – Not So Straight Up has reached 8790 people through its online campaign, and 200 people in person at CBR Fair Day 2019, exceeding the target of 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population (roughly 8500 people).¹

SMART Sessions

Is the peer navigator service reaching target populations?

SMART Sessions – the peer navigation service – engaged five LGBTIQ+ people. This is lower than the objective of supporting 20 people through peer navigation. The low uptake of this services is a likely result of COVID-19 disruptions to service delivery.

Is the peer navigator service high quality?

The evaluation of SMART Sessions found that it delivered a quality service that was highly valued by clients: 100% of respondents (n=3) rated their experience as good or excellent and 100% were satisfied or very satisfied with support provided by the facilitator.

AOD training

Is the training reaching key AOD services?

Meridian delivered LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training to 17 organisations from the AOD sector to ensure that services understand the needs of diverse communities and can provide treatment and support safely and inclusively. Some organisations requested repeat training.

Is the training high quality?

Findings from the training evaluation demonstrate that it is of a high quality and is useful to organisations. Ninety-one per cent of training participants who completed the survey (n=43) said that the training was relevant or very relevant to their needs. Ninety-eight per cent rated Meridian, as the training provider, mostly or completely approachable and welcoming; safe and inclusive; and professional.

Resources

Are the resources relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities?

The program undertook a number of strategies to ensure that information provided by the campaign was relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities, including community research and convening a reference group.

¹ There are no population statistics on the number of LGBTIQ+ people in Canberra. This number was based on an estimate of the percentage of people who have diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity in Australia included in the Australian Human Rights Commission (2014) Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People, viewed at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people>.

Impact evaluation

Objective 1: The campaign

Social media and website metrics show that the campaign reached 8790 audience members in the contract period, and 200 people through SoBar's presence at CBR Fair Day 2019. This exceeds the target of 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population (roughly 8500 people).

Objective 2: Resources

The program increased LGBTIQ+ people's access to resources through the following strategies:

- Development and distribution of resources and information, including a "tips for low-risk drinking" poster, a "mixing alcohol and other drugs" poster, a poster with information on alcohol and drug use for trans and gender diverse people, as well as postcards raising awareness of SoBar.
- Providing information through social media that addresses the drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and sharing tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking.
- Undertaking research to contribute to the evidence base on LGBTIQ+ people's experiences, knowledge and behaviours around alcohol consumption, social norms relating to alcohol, and strategies to manage risky drinking.
- Providing information about resources and strategies for reducing risky drinking to LGBTIQ+ people through SMART Sessions.

Objective 3: Training of AOD professionals

Meridian delivered LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training to 17 organisations and services in the AOD sector to ensure that services understand the needs of LGBTIQ+ people and can provide treatment and support safely and inclusively. Of the 43 training participants who completed a survey:

- 81% said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to provide appropriate services to LGBTIQ+ people to address drinking behaviours.
- 95% said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to work productively and respectfully with LGBTIQ+ people.
- 95% think the training it will contribute a great deal or a lot to their service being more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people.

Objective 4: Inclusive services

The program increased LGBTIQ+ people's access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues in two key ways:

1. Website

The SoBar – Not So Straight Up dedicated website (notsostraightup.org) provides information about AOD treatment services, indicating which services have participated in the LGBTIQ+ inclusion training. The website has been viewed over 400 times with the greatest click-through rate (45%) on the "help and support" page.

2. SMART Sessions

These sessions were very effective at increasing clients' access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues: 100% of clients had improved access to information, services and support and 100% had more information and support as a result of using the service.

SoBar – Not So Straight Up evaluation report

Background

Meridian appointed Collective Action, a social impact consultancy, to support the evaluation of the SoBar – Not So Straight Up program.

SoBar – Not So Straight Up aims to reduce alcohol-related harm within LGBTIQ+ communities in the ACT. It focuses on increasing awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful alcohol use, changing social norms influencing risky drinking behaviour and alcohol culture, and supporting access to suitable treatment and self-help options. The program works with LGBTIQ+ people in a supportive and non-judgmental way, whether they want to be more informed about alcohol use, use drugs and alcohol more safely, or get support to reduce or stop use.

This two-year project was funded by ACT Health as part of the Healthy Canberra Grants program. The project will help sexually and gender diverse people and people with HIV reduce the harms associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs by providing a range of relevant support services.

Evaluation objectives

The objectives of the evaluation were to:

- Determine whether activities planned under each objective were delivered.
- Assess outcomes of the activities against the program and evaluation plan, which formed part of the Deed of Grant for the program.
- Analyse data gathered from client surveys, website and social media metrics, and feedback on activities to examine the impact of the activities undertaken under each objective of the program.

Methodology

The evaluation of SoBar – Not So Straight Up was conducted in two parts: a process evaluation assessing the reach and quality of activities delivered and an impact evaluation assessing the impact of the activities.

Meridian has an established monitoring and evaluation system that was used for both the process and impact evaluation. The Contribution to Change (C2C) Framework is founded on the recognition that social change is a dynamic and complicated process, and it is therefore not realistic to attempt to attribute social change to any one program, or organisation. The C2C methodology draws on social research to identify the pathways of change from program-level outcomes through to longer-term changes in behaviour. By utilising social research in this way, we can say with confidence that if an organisation's programs are successful in achieving the desired short-term outcomes, they will contribute towards the associated community-level outcomes over the long term. This information is used to inform indicators and evaluation questions. In turn, the C2C approach ensures the outcomes of the evaluation contribute toward the program goal.

The C2C system uses a cloud-based platform, Socialsuite, which enables service users and stakeholders to provide feedback easily and anonymously about their experiences of Meridian's services. This data is automatically aggregated under outcomes and displayed in an interactive reporting dashboard in real time. As such, Meridian can monitor progress towards objectives and adapt approaches as needed. We are able to use this system to generate a report showing the outcomes achieved by this program.

Process evaluation

The process evaluation assessed how effectively the program was delivered by exploring inputs, outputs, and feedback on implementation. The process evaluation for this program assessed six questions and drew from website and social media data, client feedback and evaluation data, and records of resources and trainings offered.

The evaluation questions were:

- Is the campaign reaching target audiences?
- Is the training reaching key AOD services?
- Is the training high quality?
- Is the peer navigator service reaching target populations?
- Is the peer navigator service high quality?
- Are the resources relevant to target communities?

The process evaluation used the following methods:

- Analysing website and social media metrics.
- Assessing the reach of project activities, including SoBar pop-up stall at CBR Fair Day 2019 and AOD training.
- Surveying training participants on the quality of the AOD training (see Annex 1 for the surveys and Annex 2 for the report).
- Surveying clients on the quality of the SMART Sessions peer navigation service (see Annex 1 for the surveys and Annex 3 for the report).

Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation assessed the outcomes achieved by the project. It assessed the extent to which the program has achieved its objectives by measuring outcomes that can be attributed to the program, including positive, negative, intended and unintended outcomes. The impact evaluation used the following methods:

- Analysing website and social media metrics.
- Surveying training participants on the effectiveness of the training.
- Surveying clients on the effectiveness of the SMART Sessions peer navigation service.

Process evaluation findings

Were the activities implemented as planned?

SoBar – Not So Straight Up has completed all of its planned activities, meeting or exceeding strategic targets under each objective.

However, the delivery of SoBar had to change to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. SoBar was intended to be delivered at community events, but social distancing measures saw these opportunities cease for the greater part of 2020. Prior to its shift to online messaging, SoBar was able to appear at CBR Fair Day 2019, and it engaged 200 people.

2020 also saw national alcohol retail sales increase by \$3.3 billion.² Alcohol retailers and online delivery companies engaged in prolific marketing that promoted using alcohol as a way to cope during the pandemic. As a result, unprecedented amounts of alcohol entered the homes of Australians. This both increased the need for a program like SoBar – Not So Straight Up and altered the landscape for the implementation of the program.

The program responded to these challenges by shifting to an online campaign and incorporating messaging about staying home and staying safe. AOD training was also conducted in a split format both online and face-to-face.

The program activities are outlined below.

Objective 1: The campaign

- Literature review of alcohol use among LGBTIQ+ people, social norms and effective campaign messaging and strategies.
- Surveys of ACT LGBTIQ+ community drinking behaviours and drivers of risky drinking behaviour in the ACT.
- Reference group and consultation meetings with members of ACT's LGBTIQ+ communities and with Meridian staff.
- Targeted social marketing messages from SoBar via Instagram and Facebook.
- A SoBar pop-up stall at CBR Fair Day 2019.
- Distributing and promoting resources at venues and events and through existing networks.

Objective 2: Resources

A literature review was conducted to identify existing resources targeting risky drinking and AOD use and gaps in resources. This informed the development of the following resources:

- SoBarCBR Instagram profile.
- SoBarCBR Facebook profile.
- https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_not_so_straight_up
- notsostraightup.org.au website. We are in the process of amalgamating this site into the main Meridian site so we can ensure it has continued longevity and sustainability.
- Tips for low-risk drinking poster.
https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_tips_for_low_risk_drinking_poster

² <https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Alcohol-retail-industry-during-COVID-19.pdf>

- Mixing alcohol and other drugs information poster.
https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_mixing_aod_poster
- A poster with information on alcohol and drug use for trans and gender diverse people.
https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_trans_and_gender_diverse_poster
- SoBar postcards promoting key messages about resilience, self-care, moderation and sobriety.
- SoBar postcard leading community members to the website via QR code for assistance with alcohol moderation.
- SoBar brochure advertising SMART Sessions and LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training.
- SMART Sessions poster. https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_smart_recovery
- https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_bus_card
- https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_trifold_flier

Objective 3: Training of AOD professionals

- LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training was delivered to 17 organisations and services in the AOD sector to ensure that services understand the needs of diverse communities and can provide treatment and support in a safe and inclusive manner.

Objective 4: Inclusive services

- Training of existing peer navigators/counsellors in AOD support.
- SMART Recovery Facilitator Training was conducted with two trained facilitators in place for SMART Sessions.
- 34 SMART Sessions (peer navigation sessions) were delivered.

Is the campaign reaching target audiences?

Social media and website metrics show that SoBar – Not So Straight Up has reached 8790 people, exceeding the target of 20% of Canberra’s LGBTIQ+ population (roughly 8500 people).³ Additionally, the SoBar stall at CBR Fair Day 2019 engaged 200 people.

The SoBar online campaign had the following reach:

- @SoBarCBR Instagram account reached 3907 people.
- @SoBarCBR Facebook account reached 4774 people.
- The SoBar – Not So Straight Up website reached 400 people.

Over 80% of people who engaged with @SoBarCBR are not followers of existing Meridian channels, demonstrating that SoBar is reaching new audiences. On Instagram alone, there was a 63% engagement rate from users not previously connected to Meridian.

³ As there are no population statistics on the number of LGBTIQ+ people in Canberra, this estimate was based on an estimate of the percentage of people who have diverse sexual orientation, sex or gender identity in Australia included in the Australian Human Rights Commission (2014) Face the facts: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People, viewed at <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/face-facts-lesbian-gay-bisexual-trans-and-intersex-people>.

The campaign has had both national and international reach. While focused on the ACT, Project Officer Caedz Hull presented the program as part of the online global Mindful Drinking Festival. Caedz was a panellist for “Socialising Sober – The Australian Edit” and for “Breakfast with Proud & Sober” and shared insights from research findings, concepts of minority stress and “drinking to cope” theories to over 800 viewers across Facebook and YouTube concurrently. The presentations were also streamed on the Club Soda YouTube channel on August 1, 2020. The videos posted to YouTube have had 228 views (134 for “Socialising Sober” and 94 for “Breakfast with Proud & Sober”).

Is the training reaching key AOD services?

Meridian delivered LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training to 17 occasions across 11 organisations from the AOD sector to ensure that services understand the needs of diverse communities and can provide treatment and support safely and inclusively.

Training predominantly reached drug and alcohol counselling/treatment services (51% of training feedback came from this sector). According to evaluation data (see Annex 2) the majority of organisations that received training offer some form of drug and alcohol counselling and treatment (81%).

Training was delivered to the following sectors:

- Aged care
- Church/religious organisations
- Community services and community health services
- Counselling
- Drug and alcohol counselling and treatment
- Housing and homelessness services
- Family support
- Specialist health services
- Mental health services
- Youth services.

Is the training high quality?

Findings from the training evaluation demonstrate that it is of a high quality and is useful to organisations. Ninety-one per cent of training participants who completed the survey (n=43) said that the training was relevant or very relevant to their needs. Ninety-eight per cent rated Meridian, as the training provider, mostly or completely approachable and welcoming; safe and inclusive; and professional. An overwhelming majority of comments from training participants (27 participants) show that they found the training to be useful, well-executed and relevant. Common themes were that they thought the facilitators were good (17 participants), and that the training was informative and they learned a lot from the training (eight participants). As one said:

“Really loved the training. It was so engaging and the presenters were so vibrant and personable. Would definitely recommend to others in the org, sector and community.”

Is the peer navigator service high quality?

Data from the evaluation of the SoBar – Not So Straight Up SMART Sessions peer navigator service (see Annex 3) indicate that it delivers a quality service that is highly valued by clients. Clients have a good experience with the service and feel that the peer navigators create safe environments for them.

The SMART Sessions peer navigator service was highly rated by clients:

- 100% of respondents (n=3) rated their experience as good or excellent.
- 100% (n=3) were satisfied or very satisfied with support provided by the facilitator.

Is the peer navigator service reaching target populations?

SMART Sessions have engaged five people but have a small and loyal following of three people who attend weekly. This is notably lower than the activity's objective of supporting 20 people through the SMART Sessions. This is a likely result of COVID-19 disruptions to service delivery.

The three people who attended the SMART Sessions and completed the survey are all men between the ages of 45 and 54. All three are members of the LGBTIQ+ community: all three identify as gay, one person has a disability, and one person is living with HIV.

Are the resources relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities?

The program undertook a number of strategies to ensure that information provided by the campaign was relevant to LGBTIQ+ communities. Strategies included:

- Reviewing existing resources to identify gaps.
- A literature review into LGBTIQ+ people's drinking behaviours and factors influencing those behaviours.
- Community surveys to learn about the social norms that impact LGBTIQ+ people's drinking behaviour (the survey is available in Annex 1 and a report on the results in Annex 4).
- Reference group meetings with LGBTIQ+ community members.
- Consultation meetings with Meridian staff with lived experience.

Findings from the research indicated that providing information on the following topics would be most relevant and useful to LGBTIQ+ people:

- Why and how to foster a healthy relationship with alcohol that suits one's own life goals and wellbeing.
- How and why to talk about alcohol harm minimisation with someone you love.
- How to manage alcohol consumption to avoid or minimise risk.

Information on these topics was featured in the SoBar – Not So Straight Up resources.

Findings on the impact of SoBar – Not So Straight Up

Objective 1: The campaign

Objective 1 of the project is that approximately 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population are exposed to tailored messaging that challenges social norms around alcohol within LGBTIQ+ communities, raises awareness of the health and wellbeing impacts of harmful drinking and promotes strategies for addressing risky drinking behaviour.

As detailed above under the process evaluation, the project's social media and website metrics show that the campaign has reached 8790 audience members in the contract period, exceeding the target of 20% of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ population (roughly 8500 people).

Around 70% of engagements across the differing platforms on individual posts result in further action – following a link to the website, commenting or endorsing a post with a reaction. The SoBar campaign had an average engagement rate of 63% on Instagram alone.

LGBTIQ+ people validate that the messaging is effective in enabling the LGBTIQ+ community to develop healthier relationships to alcohol. All three clients who responded to the survey about the SMART Sessions program agreed that they would be effective in enabling the LGBTIQ+ community to develop healthier relationships to alcohol and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Objective 2: Resources

Objective 2 of the program was that LGBTIQ+ people in the ACT have increased access to information resources that address the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking.

The program increased LGBTIQ+ people's access to resources in three key ways.

1. Development and distribution of resources and information.

SoBar – Not So Straight Up developed and distributed information resources. These addressed the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and shared tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking. The project developed four key resources:

1. The **"Tips for low-risk drinking"** poster was developed and disseminated via the Meridian website. It provides information on managing risks when drinking, and reducing and keeping track of the amount of alcohol being consumed.

https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_tips_for_low_risk_drinking_poster

2. The **"Mixing alcohol and other drugs"** poster provides information on the risks and harmful health effects of mixing consumption of alcohol with other drugs. It was promoted through the campaign and distributed to pubs, nightclubs and other key venues that LGBTIQ+ people attend.

https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_mixing_aod_poster

3. The poster with information on **alcohol and drug use for trans and gender diverse people**, provides targeted information about the risks of alcohol and drug use, including interactions with hormone replacement therapy. It was promoted through the campaign and distributed to pubs, nightclubs and other key venues that LGBTIQ+ people attend.

https://www.meridianact.org.au/sobar_trans_and_gender_diverse_poster

4. **SoBar postcards** were developed and distributed to pubs, nightclubs and other key venues that LGBTIQ+ people attend. Meridian's research found that drinking in LGBTIQ+ communities stems from a combination of minority stress, trauma and the physical manifestation of culture in clubs and pubs. Fear of stigma and discrimination in accessing services to find support to reduce drinking compounds these barriers. SoBar postcards aim to promote key messages about the importance of resilience and loving oneself in order to assist with moderation in alcohol use. By demonstrating a sense of empathy in messaging around the journey to moderating alcohol consumption, SoBar – Not So Straight Up aims to promote help-seeking behaviours and position itself as an approachable and safe space for LGBTIQ+ people to find support.

In addition to developing these resources, the SoBar – Not So Straight Up campaign shared resources from other sources and programs including Hello Sunday Morning's ten tips for staying alcohol free and the FARE Australia TOM campaign.

2. Contributing to the general evidence base by sharing knowledge and insights about LGBTIQ+ people's experiences, knowledge and behaviours around alcohol consumption, social norms relating to alcohol, and strategies to manage risky drinking.

Research was conducted through three community research surveys. One of these surveys was delivered online and at the SoBar pop-up stall at CBR Fair Day 2019 to seek an understanding of drinking behaviours in LGBTIQ+ communities and capture interest in reference group participation. This survey gathered 150 responses.

A further two surveys were delivered online only, with one addressing LGBTIQ+ people in the ACT who drink alcohol and the other addressing LGBTIQ+ people in the ACT who no longer drink alcohol. While the response (over 1123), the research validated the "minority stress" and "drinking-to-cope" theories outlined in the literature review. The surveys found that the majority of participants are aware of the health risks and wellbeing impacts of alcohol misuse. They believe peer support services or online support would be the most effective tool in reducing alcohol harm among LGBTIQ+ community members, as fear of stigma and discrimination is a key barrier to accessing services.

The program held five reference group meetings with between eight and 12 people attending. It also held two consultation meetings with 12 members of Meridian's staff who have lived experience. The reference group cohort represents the diversity of the LGBTIQ+ communities as well as a range of drinking behaviours. These reference groups were designed to test social media messaging on moderation. In early 2020, face-to-face reference groups were suspended as a consequence of COVID-19 social distancing measures.

Respondents recognised that there are elevated rates of drinking within LGBTIQ+ communities. While many feel that this is likely because it is seen as part of LGBTIQ+ culture and because inclusive venues typically serve alcohol, more participants attributed high rates of drinking to Australia's drinking culture more generally. The picture of competence around risky drinking behaviours show that most respondents do not feel that binge drinking (more than four drinks in one sitting) is unacceptable. A report is attached in Annex 4.

In addition to informing the resources and messages developed for this program, this research will contribute to building the evidence base about the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking. Meridian will advocate for other organisations and programs developing resources on alcohol consumption to use this evidence base to ensure their resources are relevant to, and effective for, LGBTIQ+ communities.

The research will continue to assist Meridian in forming more robust services for LGBTIQ+ health needs. It will also form the basis for community consultations on AOD use and service needs in LGBTIQ+ communities as a part of Meridian's newly awarded Local Drug Action Team status.

3. Providing information about resources and strategies for reducing risky drinking to LGBTIQ+ people through SMART Sessions.

Feedback from SMART Sessions demonstrates that the LGBTIQ+ people reached by the peer navigation service have increased access to information resources that address the specific drivers of risky drinking among LGBTIQ+ communities and tailored strategies for addressing this risky drinking. All clients of the SMART Sessions reported increased understanding of treatment options, strategies to reduce harmful drinking behaviours, and self-help strategies to manage their attitudes towards and behaviours around alcohol.

Most clients (67%) who participated in the survey reported that the program had either been mostly or completely effective in contributing to their stronger understandings of risky drinking behaviours.

Most (67%) report assessing their own drinking to see if it was risky. Sixty-seven per cent said they had a better understanding of the health impacts of drinking.

Objective 3: Training of AOD professionals

Meridian delivered LGBTIQ+ AOD awareness training to 17 organisations and services in the AOD sector. This training aimed to educate services about the needs of LGBTIQ+ people and support them to provide treatment and support in a safe and inclusive manner.

Training participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to provide feedback about the quality and effectiveness of the training. Forty-three people completed the questionnaire. The evaluation found that the training was highly effective in strengthening the capacity of AOD services to deliver inclusive services to LGBTIQ+ people. All expected changes identified in the evaluation plan were achieved by the training.

1. Increasing services' understanding of the identities and experiences of LGBTIQ+ people.

- 88% said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to use inclusive language and terminology when engaging with LGBTIQ+ people.
- 81% said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to provide appropriate services to LGBTIQ+ people to address drinking behaviours.

2. Increasing services' understandings of the social norms around alcohol within LGBTIQ+ communities.

Training participants were asked to rate how effective the training was in increasing their understanding of factors in LGBTIQ+ communities that influence drinking behaviours on a 5-point scale from not effective to very effective. They reported they had a better understanding of:

- Drinking to cope with negative thoughts and experiences (91%).
- Minority stress and discrimination (88%).
- Pressures to drink to fit in or feel like a part of the community (88%).
- Social drinking and associations with venues serving alcohol (86%).

3. Increasing services' understanding of the stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBTIQ+ people and how this relates to risky drinking among this group.

Ninety-one per cent of the participants said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to understand drinking behaviours of LGBTIQ+ people. One participant commented:

"Really liked that the training was from an identity lens! Made it more individual and not about a community. Often occurs that people in our programs question their gender and/or sexual identities (sometimes it's what is sitting behind their AOD use), but also know that we can be better at supporting people who are questioning and link them with the right services, at the right time. Was great to hear about Meridian's services and the SoBar movement – think it's fabulous!"

4. Increasing services' understanding of how they can create a more inclusive service for LGBTIQ+ people.

- 95% said the training was mostly or completely effective in improving their ability to work productively and respectfully with LGBTIQ+ people.
- 95% think it will contribute a great deal or a lot to their service being more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people.

Objective 4: Inclusive services

Objective 4 was to facilitate LGBTIQ+ people's increased access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues. The project did this in two key ways.

1. Website

The SoBar – Not So Straight Up dedicated website (notsostraightup.org) provides information about AOD treatment services, indicating which services have participated in SoBar – Not So Straight Up's LGBTIQ+ inclusion training for AOD services. The website has been viewed over 400 times with the greatest click-through rate (45%) on the "help and support" page, showing that it was effective at connecting people to inclusive services.

2. SMART Sessions

The peer navigation service works to connect LGBTIQ+ people to treatment services by providing information on services and forging referral pathways. Although only three people attended the SMART Sessions, the sessions were very effective at increasing clients' access to inclusive services to address risky drinking and alcohol issues. Evaluation data shows that 100% of clients said that it had improved their access to information, services and support (a great deal or completely). One hundred per cent had more information and support as a result of using the service.

One hundred per cent of clients said they feel more confident using other services since attending the program. Additionally, the program has connected some SMART Session clients into Meridian's Wellbeing Services.

SMART Sessions also resulted in direct behaviour changes in clients. All three clients had altered drinking behaviours by a lot or completely. They had all become more aware of their drinking behaviours and motivators and had begun to use strategies to manage their drinking behaviours. They all reported experiencing improved health and wellbeing, and all of them identified that a major way their health and wellbeing improved was through their mental health.

All three attendees who responded to the evaluation said in comments they felt the service has contributed to positive life changes for them. One attendee stated they have been able to reduce their drinking since attending:

"Being introduced to Meridian through Canberra sexual health clinic has changed my life totally for the better. For years I used to see a paid private clinical psychologist and it was not working. I was unemployed for six months this year and gained 15kgs from drinking at home alone. Meridian psychologist Tom counselled me when I was unemployed and he introduced me to Smart Recovery facilitated by Caedz and both have totally changed my mental wellbeing and my outlook on life. Both Caedz and Tom are full of amazing wisdom and strategies to help me improve my life both mentally, emotionally and physically. My life has changed for the better by them giving me strategies and tools that have helped me reduce my drinking."

Meridian will continue to provide SMART Sessions to the LGBTIQ+ community and has engaged three further facilitators since the inception of the sessions. One of these facilitators has been put forward as a peer from their own success in managing sobriety and wellbeing goals as a consequence of the SMART Sessions.

Learnings and conclusions from the evaluation

SoBar –Not So Straight Up has delivered on its objectives despite the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, which interfered with planned face-to-face activities and forced some of those activities to be shifted online.

The project contributed to supporting improvements in LGBTIQ+ people's knowledge about risky drinking behaviours, the risks of mixing alcohol with other drugs, and strategies to manage or reduce drinking.

Through its training activities, SoBar –Not So Straight Up has supported key services and organisations offering treatment and support for drug and alcohol use with strategies for how to be more inclusive of LGBTIQ+ clients. It has also enabled services to increase their understandings of the factors that influence the drinking behaviours of LGBTIQ+ people, equipping them with the knowledge they need to effectively engage this population.

Meridian plans to continue its work in this area by offering ongoing SMART Sessions to the LGBTIQ+ community in Canberra. While the first iteration of the SMART Sessions only attracted five participants, the evaluation shows that it is a highly effective model. As such, Meridian has invested in training three people to deliver it in an ongoing way. It is expected that as social distancing restrictions are lifted, SMART Sessions will enjoy a greater reach and level of engagement. Ultimately, these activities work to support the improved health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people in the ACT by reducing harmful drinking behaviours and increasing the availability and accessibility of inclusive services.