

## Understanding Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder for Substance Misuse



The following provides an overview of the connection between PTSD and substance misuse in Australia.

### Prevalence of PTSD and Substance Misuse

**PTSD Rates:** In Australia, the prevalence of PTSD varies across different populations. It is estimated that around 5-10% of the general population will experience PTSD at some point in their lives.



However, certain groups, such as veterans, emergency service workers, and survivors of interpersonal violence, may have higher rates of PTSD.

**Substance Misuse Rates:** Individuals with PTSD are at an increased risk of developing substance use disorders. According to the Australian National Survey on Mental Health and Wellbeing, people with PTSD have higher rates of alcohol and drug dependence compared to those without PTSD.



### Link Between PTSD and Substance Misuse

***Self-Medication:*** Many individuals with PTSD may turn to drugs or alcohol as a means of coping with distressing symptoms. Substance use may provide temporary relief from the anxiety, nightmares, insomnia, and hyperarousal associated with PTSD.

**Avoidance and numbing:** Individuals with PTSD may engage in substance misuse as a way to numb painful emotions and avoid distressing memories or reminders of the traumatic event.



**Co-Occurring Disorders:** PTSD often co-occurs with other mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders. These conditions can exacerbate and interact with each other, leading to a more complex clinical presentation.

**Trauma Retraumatization:** Substance misuse can increase the risk of experiencing additional traumatic events or retraumatization. Impaired judgment, risky behaviors, and involvement in dangerous situations associated with substance use can lead to further traumas and perpetuate the cycle of PTSD symptoms.

## Treatment Considerations

***Integrated Treatment:*** Treating both PTSD and substance misuse concurrently is essential for successful recovery. Integrated treatment approaches that address both disorders simultaneously have shown positive outcomes in managing co-occurring conditions.



***Trauma-Informed Care:*** Providing trauma-informed care is crucial when working with individuals with PTSD and substance misuse. It involves creating a safe and supportive environment, recognizing the impact of trauma, and adopting approaches that empower individuals and promote healing.

***Evidence-Based Therapies:*** Therapies such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) have



demonstrated effectiveness in treating PTSD and co-occurring substance misuse. These therapies help individuals process traumatic experiences, manage triggers and develop healthy coping strategies.

***Pharmacotherapy:*** Medications may be prescribed to manage specific symptoms of PTSD or address co-occurring mental health conditions. Additionally, medications for substance use disorders, such as opioid agonists or medications to reduce alcohol cravings, may be utilized in certain cases.



***Supportive Services:*** Peer support groups and support networks, such as trauma-focused groups or 12-step programs, can provide individuals with a sense of community, understanding, and encouragement in their recovery journey.



There are a wide range of support and resource options available at the ELPIS Foundation of Australia for those who are or may know someone affected by drug or alcohol addiction.

Reach out to ELPIS today.

Tel: (02) 9816 1859

E: [info@elpisfoundation.org.au](mailto:info@elpisfoundation.org.au)

## Emergency Support Information

The ELPIS Foundation of Australia is not a crisis centre and cannot provide crisis support.

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, please call:

Emergency | 000

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

02 9361 8000 or free call 1800 422 599 (NSW regional and rural callers).

Lifeline Australia – 13 11 14

<https://www.lifeline.org.au>

1800 RESPECT

<https://www.1800respect.org.au>

Alcoholics Anonymous

<https://aa.org.au>

Narcotics Anonymous

<https://www.na.org.au>