

Writing An Effective News Release

Part of organizing your *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)* events is spreading the word about your activities. The most efficient way to do this is by writing and distributing a timely news release to the local media. The media, whether attending your events or not, can publish stories about *Recovery Month* and ultimately showcase the importance of the campaign and raise awareness of treatment of and recovery from substance use disorders.

News Releases: Detailed and Effective

As you develop a news release, keep in mind the difference between a news release and a media advisory (see sidebar).

Your news release should include information on your organization's most newsworthy event/activity for *Recovery Month*. If you are planning more than one newsworthy event, consider sending out separate news releases for each event, if they can stand on their own. Otherwise, send one news release along with a fact sheet that describes all of the *Recovery Month* activities that you are planning. Some examples of newsworthy *Recovery Month* events are:

- Honoring local individuals or organizations for their efforts to help those with substance use disorders
- Planning an event to feature a local policymaker or official issuing a *Recovery Month* proclamation
- Conducting seminars or workshops featuring a local or national celebrity speaker
- Publicizing the local impact of a national news event, such as the *Recovery Month* kick-off event in Washington, D.C., and offering a local angle to it
- Beginning a new type of service or making significant changes to existing services
- Launching a new public education program to address the costs and benefits—both monetarily and as it relates to personal health—of investing in treatment
- Forming a council or task force to help businesses implement substance use disorder and treatment education programs in the workplace
- Announcing the results of a poll or study on substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery

“Media Advisory” = A concise account of your issue intended to invite media to your event.

“News Release” = A more detailed account of your issue that media use for additional background. It may contain quotes from local experts and a wide variety of information about *Recovery Month*.

Writing Tips for Your News Release

- **Use the traditional format** – The news release should be issued on your organization's letterhead, or on the *Recovery Month* letterhead provided in this planning toolkit and on the Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. If using your own, remember to include the logos of any other organizations that you are partnering with in planning your events.

The structure of the page should be as follows. At the top, include the name, phone number, and e-mail address of a knowledgeable contact who will be readily accessible, able to respond to media questions, and can refer media to others who can provide additional information. Begin the release with the name of your city and the date that the release is disseminated. If the release is longer than one page, write “more” at the bottom center of each page; the end of the news release should be marked by typing “###” centered below the last sentence.

Remember to mention the theme of *Recovery Month 2007*, which is “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars.*”

- **Keep it short** – A news release should not be longer than three pages, double-spaced, and should be written in short and concise sentences and paragraphs. Two-page releases are preferable. If applicable, start with a one-sentence summary of your event. It should be concise and convey why your event is taking place, why the issues covered are relevant to your community, and why it is newsworthy. Reporters can see hundreds of releases a week, so make yours stand out.
- **Emphasize the most important details** – Begin with a headline in all CAPS that summarizes the release and engages the media. The first paragraph should answer the five basic questions about what you are publicizing for *Recovery Month*: who, what, where, when, and why.
- **Mention your local activities early in the release** – Local media outlets and audiences are most interested in what is happening in your community during *Recovery Month*. With that in mind, include in your release local statistics about the number of people in your state or region who suffer from substance use disorders.
- **Be careful with the language that you use** – Avoid using slang, acronyms, or jargon, and, if necessary, give clear and concise explanations of complicated terms. Spell out acronyms the first time you use them, with appropriate abbreviations appearing in parentheses directly after. They can be referred to by the abbreviation any time after this point.
- **Write factually** – Opinions should be written in direct quotes only. The language should be similar to a typical news article you read in your local newspaper; this will make it easier for the media to use the release. When quoting an individual in your *Recovery Month* release, please get his or her consent before publishing.
- **Check for accuracy** – Be sure to verify all spelling, statistics, names, and titles in your news release.

Tools to help you customize your release include:

- **The news release template** at the end of this document, which can be adapted to fit your needs. Make sure you edit the placeholders in the brackets as necessary. Electronic versions of these materials and other templates are available on the *Recovery Month* Web site, www.recoverymonth.gov.
- **Local statistics**, which can be obtained from the Single-State Agency (SSA) in your state. Refer to the SSA Directory included in the “Resources” section of this toolkit. State-specific treatment information also can be found in the *Treatment Episode Data Set* at www.dasis.samhsa.gov/webt/NewMapv1.htm, as well as from the *National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services*. Information on treatment facilities in your area can be found at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

- **The 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings**, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which is another important source of state-related information. This survey is available through the SAMHSA Web site at www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm.

Distribution Tip: You can distribute your news release to local print, broadcast, and Internet media by fax or e-mail the morning of your *Recovery Month* event. Also ensure that it is included in any materials that you distribute at the event.

Effectively Sharing a News Release with the Media

For help with your news release distribution, follow the media list and distribution instructions in the “Media Advisory” document in this toolkit. Develop a media list of reporters who may be interested in covering the story and use it to distribute the news release the morning of the event.

Be persistent by making follow-up calls to encourage media to write or produce a story, and also to attend the event. Try to schedule an interview with an official of your organization to provide additional information. After your event, collect samples of any resulting media coverage to document your outreach efforts.

Share Your Activities and Successes

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month 2007* with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. By sharing your planning and activities, you are helping to generate momentum, thereby increasing outreach efforts to touch millions of lives that are affected by substance use disorders.

You also can share community success stories and other outreach efforts during *Recovery Month* by completing the Customer Satisfaction Form in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Please send samples of your organization’s *Recovery Month* promotional materials to: Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically at the *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit the Web site or call 1-800-662-HELP. For additional information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, please visit SAMHSA’s Web site at www.samhsa.gov.

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

media outreach

[Please adapt as needed for your event.]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: [Name – *Must be a person who is available to answer questions from the media*]
[Phone Number – *Include cell phone number if the person is not always available at the office*]
[E-mail Address]

Sample headline: EDUCATIONAL ROUNDTABLE [OR OTHER EVENT] URGES [CITY'S] RESIDENTS TO
RECOGNIZE SAVINGS ASSOCIATED WITH TREATMENT OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

[Number] people locally are affected by substance use disorders

[city, state], [date] – According to experts who spoke at a roundtable today, providing treatment for people with substance use disorders can directly improve the public's health and safety, as well as reduce health costs for people in the community. Experts also revealed that more than [number] of [city]'s residents have a substance use disorder.

The event highlighted the community's investment in treatment and addressed how cost and insurance barriers affect area residents' access to treatment. Studies have shown that treatment is cost effective, with some measurements showing a benefit-to-cost ratio of up to 7:1, with substance use disorder treatment costing \$1,583 per person on average. This is a monetary benefit to society of nearly \$11,487 for each person treated.

[Event name] was held to underscore the value of investing in treatment, which can not only help people regain their lives, but also help the community prosper. [Name of a prominent local official] discussed with [list other event participants, such as employers, members of the treatment community, etc.] how community members can better support people and affected family members seeking treatment for substance use disorders.

Drug use disorders alone are estimated to cost American businesses approximately \$128.6 billion in lost productivity each year, and alcohol dependence alone is estimated to cause 500 million lost workdays annually. In 2005, nearly 77 percent of adults classified with substance use dependence or abuse were employed. Reported job problems, including incomplete work, absenteeism, tardiness, work-related injuries, mistakes, and disagreements with supervisors are cut by an average of 75 percent among employees who have received treatment for substance use disorders.

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“Substance use disorders can take an enormous toll on productivity in the workforce and can have far-reaching consequences for families and communities, both emotionally and financially. It is in our city’s best interest to support those who need our help,” said **[full name of local spokesperson, title, and organization]**. “Every September, *Recovery Month* reminds us of the importance of making treatment accessible, addresses the hurdles some face when seeking treatment, and educates our community that treatment is effective and that recovery is possible.”

The **[event]**, sponsored by **[name and brief description of your organization]**, is part of a national initiative known as *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)*, which is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The *Recovery Month* theme for 2007 is “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars.*” This year marks the 18th annual observance of *Recovery Month*, which celebrates people and their families in recovery from substance use disorders and promotes the need for better awareness and financial access to treatment services.

[Organization name] Urges Residents to Recognize People in Recovery

[Name of event] featured **[provide details of the event and specific points that were addressed]**.

[Organization name] also has planned additional *Recovery Month* events:

- Educational materials will be distributed **[explain where, how, and starting when, such as mailing date or a specific date at health fairs]** to help employers, health care providers, and other community members become informed about substance use or co-occurring mental disorders. The materials will provide information on treatment programs and community-based recovery support programs that are offered for employees, affected families, and friends.
- **[A run/walk or other fundraising event]** will be held on **[date/time]** at **[location]** to raise money to fund new substance use disorder treatment programs for local residents or educational support programs for affected children. Funds also will support programs for affected community members’ family and friends. The event will address various financial options for receiving treatment and how to fight the stigma and discrimination people may face during recovery.

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The National *Recovery Month* Initiative

During ***Recovery Month*** each September, communities across the country join together to help people recognize that substance use disorders are treatable diseases. Participating in recovery programs for substance use disorders is as effective as receiving treatment for other chronic conditions—yet nearly 21 million people needed but did not receive treatment in 2005, according to the ***2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings***. One year after treatment, people report a significant reduction in their alcohol and drug use, increases in employment and income, and decreases in homelessness.

Throughout September, events nationwide encourage communities, civic leaders, employers, treatment and prevention organizations, faith-based organizations, and the recovery community to address the continued need for treatment, overcome the barriers that prevent people from seeking help, and ensure access to local treatment facilities.

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