

September  
National Alcohol  
& Drug Addiction  
*Recovery Month* 2009

Targeted Outreach

JOIN THE  
VOICES FOR

**RECOVERY**

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“Recovery is a life that’s second to none. Today, anything is possible.”

*Kevin Young*

Of the 23.2 million people who needed treatment for a substance use disorder, only 3.9 million people received it in 2007.

**SOURCE:** *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, pp. 77, 80.

# OVERVIEW

## Together We Learn, Together We Heal

After 20 years of educating communities nationwide about the urgent need to address addiction in this country, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is taking **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** to new audiences. This year's theme, "**Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal,**" encourages people to educate themselves and others about the new tools available on the Internet that can help people who suffer from substance use disorders and their families. The following guide will give you an overview of addiction, recovery, and how to get help.

The addiction, treatment, and recovery landscape has changed since the inception of **Recovery Month**. Positive developments include:

- Medication-assisted treatment options are better understood today and are used more widely to help people heal.<sup>1</sup>
- People are recognizing that addiction is a disease and not a character flaw.<sup>2</sup>
- People in recovery have become open about their experiences with substance use disorders.<sup>3</sup>

### A Common Problem

In 2007, an estimated 23.2 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for a substance use disorder in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Even though the rate of current illicit drug use among youths aged 12 to 17 has declined significantly from 2002 to 2007, it is startling to see how many young people start using substances at an early age.<sup>5</sup> For example, in 2007:

- 85.9 percent of people aged 12 or older who initiated alcohol use in the past year did so before they reached the legal age of 21.<sup>6</sup>
- Among people aged 12 to 49 who initiated inhalant use in the past year, the average age at first use was 17.1 years. For marijuana, the average age at first use was 17.6 years, and it was 20.2 years for cocaine, 20.2 years for Ecstasy, and 21.2 years for the nonmedical use of pain relievers.<sup>7</sup>

### Healing a Disease Through Recovery

Addiction is a disease, and just like any other chronic illness, it can be recovered from:

- Treatment and recovery support services are as effective as treatments for other diseases, such as asthma or diabetes.<sup>8</sup>
- Recovery positively affects individuals, families, and communities.

A holistic and recovery-oriented approach to overcome substance use disorders uses a wide range of age-, gender-, culturally, faith-based, and drug-appropriate services designed to help people recover physically, mentally, and spiritually.



# JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

The recovery process is specific to the person and his or her family and friends. Elements may include:

- Receiving medical attention through detoxification and individual and/or group therapy in an inpatient treatment setting
- Focusing on improving overall health and redefining oneself
- Exploring spirituality through faith-based communities
- Changing social interactions and expanding social networks – particularly to include others in recovery and participate in mutual support groups
- Empowering oneself by helping others<sup>9</sup>

## The Internet – A Recovery Resource

The Internet is becoming an increasingly effective tool for spreading recovery information. Studies show:

- About three-quarters of all adults in America use the Internet. Most (75 percent) search for health information online.<sup>10, 11</sup>
- People of all ethnic and age groups within the United States take advantage of the more than 70 different online recovery programs and services available.<sup>12</sup>

Online forums offer a community for people to share their experiences, challenges, and questions about recovery. Treatment services that are offered online can help people in rural areas and cities who may have problems with transportation to in-person treatment services. SAMHSA is taking notice of this new trend, and in 2008 devoted one of its *Road to Recovery* Webcast episodes to “Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online,” which can be viewed at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.<sup>13</sup>

Another important resource is SAMHSA’s National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP**, for toll-free information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day.

## Together We Learn, Together We Heal

When celebrating **Recovery Month** this September, teach people and their families who may be affected about how the Internet can help them support their loved ones in their treatment and recovery process. Addiction is a health problem, so do your part to let those who suffer from it know that help exists. By supporting someone who is affected, you are making a positive change in the way substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery are perceived in your community.

For a longer version that expands on this overview, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the “**Recovery Month Kit**,” and click on the “**Targeted Outreach**” link. Information about treatment options and services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment options and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

## Online Treatment and Recovery Support

- SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Web site – <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment> – Lists resources about mental health, substance abuse, and treatment
- The Sober Recovery Community – <http://www.soberrecovery.com/forums> – Offers support forums for people in recovery, as well as family and friends
- Sober.com – <http://www.sober.com/forums/default.html> – Provides message boards for people in recovery and also provides recovery coaching from professional counselors
- eGetGoing – <http://www.egetgoing.com> – Helps people new to recovery through online support groups led by certified counselors
- Shouting Inside – <http://www.shoutinginside.com> – Helps young adults who misuse substances share their stories and struggles with like-minded people

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“This journey has given me a life beyond my wildest dreams. I’ve come from a place of loneliness, shame, fear, and chaos to one of love, joy, purpose, and skills to be of service in addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery.”

*Elizabeth Currier*

People experience recovery in different ways. Some recover on their own; others recover through treatment and/or the assistance of self-help, mutual-aid groups, or medication-assisted therapies.

**SOURCE:** Venner, K.L., Matzger, H., Forcehimes, A.A., Moos, R.H., Feldstein, S.W., Willenbring, M.L. et al. (2006). Course of recovery from alcoholism. *Alcoholism, Clinical and Experimental Research*, 30, 1079-1090.

# TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

## Finding Help for Substance Use Disorders

Substance use disorders are a reality for many people. In 2007, an estimated 23.2 million people aged 12 or older needed treatment for a substance use disorder in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, treatment is effective and recovery is possible. Studies indicate that in the last 25 years, treatment and recovery services have worked to reduce drug use.<sup>2</sup>

**National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is in its 20<sup>th</sup> year of showcasing the success of recovery. The 2009 **Recovery Month** theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal,"** emphasizes the need to use all available resources, in our communities and on the Internet, to educate people about the disease and to help those with substance use disorders and their families, and those close to them, get support.

In the past 20 years, the field has evolved. In place of the traditional idea of "rehab," many who are getting help for an addiction are doing so on their own terms. From support groups and therapeutic communities to online programs, there is a solution for anyone who needs treatment and recovery support, including family members.

### Many Paths to Recovery

People experience recovery in different ways.<sup>3</sup> Some recover on their own; others recover through treatment and/or the assistance of self-help, mutual-aid groups, or medication-assisted therapies. Over the past five years, policymakers, community service workers, and researchers have focused on holistic and recovery-oriented approaches that use a wide range of age-, gender-, culturally, faith-, and drug-appropriate services to help people recover not just physically, but mentally and spiritually as well.

Elements of the recovery process may include:

- Receiving medical attention through detoxification and individual and/or group therapy in an inpatient treatment setting
- Focusing on improving overall health and redefining oneself
- Exploring spirituality through faith-based communities
- Changing social interactions and expanding social networks – particularly to include others in recovery and participate in mutual support groups
- Empowering oneself by helping others

A well-rounded recovery support network complements this process and is central for successful rehabilitation from substance use disorders. The support of family, friends, employers, and other concerned community members can help make recovery lifelong.<sup>4</sup>



## Treatment: On the Road to Recovery

Treatment programs are designed to help people and their families cope with the physical and psychological pressures of their dependency. There are more than 11,000 specialized drug treatment facilities in the United States that provide rehabilitation, behavioral therapy, counseling, medications, and other services.<sup>5</sup> Keep in mind that:

- Treatment embodies a variety of forms and approaches; it can occur in a number of settings and is most effective when catered specifically to the individual.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>
- No single treatment is appropriate for everyone.<sup>9</sup>
- Behavioral and medication therapies are central elements of the overall therapeutic recovery process that can be used alone or in combination with each other.<sup>10</sup>
- Treatment can be long or short term. Like a chronic disorder characterized by occasional relapses, addiction can involve multiple interventions and attempts at abstinence.<sup>11, 12</sup>

## Common Types of Treatment and Recovery Services

Below are some common services that many people access as part of their recovery process.

- **Outpatient treatment** emphasizes individual or group counseling for people who visit a clinic at regular intervals. It also can include family therapy.
- **Medication-assisted treatment** is an outpatient clinical program focused on individualized patient care.<sup>13</sup> Medications help suppress a drug craving and are often used in conjunction with counseling and other behavioral therapies.<sup>14, 15</sup>
- **Short-term residential treatment** is a 3- to 6-week treatment program followed by participation in mutual-support groups or extended outpatient therapy.<sup>16, 17</sup>
- **Long-term residential treatment** offers care 24 hours a day and entails an average stay of 6 to 12 months.<sup>18</sup>
- **Self-help/mutual aid groups** or recovery support services are 12-step programs, support groups, and peer counseling groups that meet on a regular basis.<sup>19</sup>

For a longer version of this treatment and recovery guide, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the “*Recovery Month Kit*,” and click on the “Targeted Outreach” link. Information about treatment options and special services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment options and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

## Online Treatment and Recovery Support

The following resources can help identify treatment and recovery resources for people in need:

- SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Web site – <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment> – Lists a range of resources about mental health, substance abuse, and treatment
- SAMHSA's "Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online" Webcast – <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/2008/multimedia/w.aspx?ID=503> – Examines how technology has revamped the field of substance use disorder prevention and addiction treatment
- Addiction and Recovery Guide – <http://www.addictionrecoveryguide.org/index.html> – Offers treatment and recovery information online
- The Sober Recovery Community – <http://www.soberrecovery.com/forums> – Offers support forums for people in recovery, as well as family and friends
- eGetGoing – <http://www.egetgoing.com> – Helps people new to recovery through online support groups led by certified counselors
- Shouting Inside – <http://www.shoutinginside.com> – Helps young adults who misuse substances share their stories and struggles with like-minded people

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### SOURCES

- 1 *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*. DHHS Publication No. [SMA] 08-4343. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies, September 2008, p. 80.
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- 15 *Treatment Methods for Drug Addiction*. Connecticut Clearinghouse, A Program of the Wheeler Clinic by the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, July 2004. Connecticut Clearinghouse Web site: <http://www.ctclearinghouse.org/topics/customer-files/Treatment-Methods-for-Drug-Addiction.pdf>. Accessed August 16, 2008.
- 16 Ibid.
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- 18 Ibid.
- 19 *National Summit on Recovery Conference Report*, pp. 5, 7.



“In a matter of four years, I lost everything, including my son and my freedom.”

*Erin Bludworth*

More than 50 percent of adults suffering from a dependence on alcohol are children of alcoholics themselves.<sup>1</sup>

**SOURCE:** *Children of Alcoholics: A Kit for Educators*. National Association for Children of Alcoholics, 2001, p. 3.

An estimated 2.7 million people aged 12 or older used an illicit drug for the first time in the past year.<sup>2</sup>

**SOURCE:** *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, p. 50.

# EDUCATORS

## Helping Educators Address Substance Use Disorders

Substance use disorders affect millions of Americans – young and old. With 69 percent of people in America saying that either their own or a loved one’s alcohol or drug problem has had some negative impact on them, it is more crucial than ever to understand substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery.<sup>1</sup>

As **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is dedicated to expanding its reach and providing tools to even more people than ever before. Educators play a central role in this year’s theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal.”** The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, urges educators to offer support and guidance to students and family members who may be affected by substance use disorders. Due to their daily involvement with children, young adults, and parents, educators are uniquely positioned to make a difference.

### Youths Are at Risk

Many young people experience a curiosity or pressure from friends to use alcohol and/or drugs. In fact, in 2007:<sup>2,3,4</sup>

- 9.5 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 were current illicit drug users.
- 10.7 million people aged 12 to 20 had used alcohol within the past month.
- 85.9 percent of people aged 12 or older who initiated alcohol use in the past year did so before they reached the legal age of 21.
- As many as 4.7 million teens said they had misused a prescription drug at some point in their lives. “Pharming” parties are becoming popular among junior high and high school students, where students trade and misuse controlled prescription drugs.

### Students With Addiction

Signs that may be red-flag indicators of drug or alcohol use among students include:

- A drop in grades at school, or skipping or being late for school
- Difficulty paying attention or remembering things
- Changes in friends, sudden avoidance of old crowd, or hesitancy to talk about new friends
- Slow or staggering walk, poor physical coordination
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare
- Smell of substance on breath, body, or clothes
- Tremors or shakes in the hands, feet, or head<sup>5</sup>

For a more comprehensive list of signs, please visit the American Council for Drug Education Web site at <http://www.acde.org/parent/signs.htm>.



## Students Who Have Family Members With a Problem

More than 50 percent of adults suffering from a dependence on alcohol are children of alcoholics themselves, and millions of others have problems that stem from alcoholism or drug addiction in their families.<sup>6</sup> To help break the cycle, watch for the following signs that a student may have a relative with a problem:

- Evidence of physical illness or abuse
- Emotional disturbances
- Difficulty in school, such as absenteeism and lower grades<sup>7</sup>

## How to Help Students

Educators should recognize certain behaviors or changes in students' attitudes. Doing so could help young people successfully overcome a crisis and develop more effective coping skills, often preventing further problems.<sup>8</sup> If you believe a student, or someone in his or her home, is suffering from a substance use disorder:

- Engage a student assistance program or social worker and offer support to help the student.
- Take the time to speak with his or her parents, or directly with the student if the parent is suspected of having a problem, and help develop a plan of action.
- Come prepared with different options for treatment, such as mutual support groups and inpatient or outpatient facilities. For teens, encourage them to become involved with Alateen, at <http://www.alateen.org>, which offers support for teens who have a family member or friend suffering with an alcohol or drug problem.

When helping students in recovery from their own or a family member's addiction, remember that:

- Recovery is a life-long process and requires commitment, introspection, and most importantly, courage.
- During the initial stages of recovery, supportive adult influences, including teachers, parents, and others, will make the most difference.
- Identifying healthy strengths, values, goals, and interests is an important step. Educators can help young people figure out what concrete actions they can take to reach their life goals.<sup>9</sup>

For a longer version of this guide for educators, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the "Recovery Month Kit," and click on the "Targeted Outreach" link. Information about treatment options and special services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment options and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

## Online Resources for Educators

**Recovery Month's** Web site at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> is filled with resources to help students and parents learn about substance use disorders. Other resources include:

- The Office of Applied Studies, SAMHSA – <http://oas.samhsa.gov> – Provides the latest national data on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug abuse, as well as information on treatment
- The National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) – <http://www.talkaboutrx.org> – Educates parents and teenagers about the importance of appropriate medicine use
- The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) – <http://www.drugabuse.gov/parent-teacher.html> – Educates people ages 11 through 15, as well as their teachers and parents, about the science behind addiction
- Check Yourself – <http://www.checkyourself.org> – Helps young adults understand issues related to addiction
- The American Council for Drug Education – <http://www.acde.org> – Offers educational programs and services designed to engage teens and address the needs of parents and other concerned adults
- The American Counseling Association – <http://www.counseling.org/Resources> – Features downloadable resources and online classes
- The American School Counselor Association – <http://www.schoolcounselor.org> – Provides professional development, publications, research, and advocacy to more than 24,000 professional school counselors around the globe

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- 8 "Signs and Symptoms of Drug Use." American Council for Drug Education Web site: <http://www.acde.org/parent/signs.htm>. p. 1. Accessed August 12, 2008.
- 9 "Recovery Support." Drug Rehab Treatment Web site: <http://www.drugrehabtreatment.com/recovery-support.html>, p. 1. Accessed August 12, 2008.



“Recovery has not always been easy, but it was always worth it!”

*Tonya Wheeler*

Between 1992 and 2006, a total of 15.8 million people reported misusing controlled prescription drugs – more than the number of people who reported misusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants, and heroin **combined**.

**SOURCE:** *You've Got Drugs! Prescription Drug Pushers on the Internet*. National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, July 2008, p. 2

# YOUNG ADULTS

## How Young Adults Can Help Themselves or Loved Ones Heal From Addiction

Substance use disorders affect almost 69 percent of people in this country, whether it is their own or someone else's problem.<sup>1</sup> To raise awareness, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> annual **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** this September. This year's theme is **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal."**

To promote advances in the field over the past 20 years since **Recovery Month** began, this year's campaign is focusing on young adults. They often are living away from their families for the first time and rely on their friends for support. They have a higher prevalence of alcohol or drug use than any other age group. In 2007:

- 35.7 percent of people aged 18 to 20 and 45.9 percent of 21- to 25-year-olds had five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the past 30 days (also known as binge drinking).<sup>2</sup>
- Young adults aged 18 to 25 used drugs at a significantly higher rate than youths aged 12 to 17 (19.7 percent versus 9.5 percent).<sup>3</sup>

If you suspect that a close friend or someone you know has an alcohol or drug problem, help him or her on a path of treatment and recovery and begin your own journey to heal.

### Understanding the Risks: Prescription Drug Misuse

Prescription drug misuse has been on the rise among young adults:

- The 2006 National Drug Control Strategy issued by the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy identified the illegal use of pharmaceuticals as one of the fastest-growing forms of drug abuse.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2007, 6 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 were current nonmedical users of prescription drugs, greater than the percentage using any illicit drug except marijuana.<sup>5</sup>
- By their sophomore year in college, about half of all students had the chance to try prescription stimulants nonmedically.<sup>6</sup>
- People often get these medicines from a friend or relative for free.<sup>7</sup>
- Mixing them with alcohol, other prescription drugs, and illegal drugs can be particularly dangerous.<sup>8</sup>

To be safe, store your medicines out of sight and away from predictable places, such as the bathroom, and know that sharing your prescription drugs with someone else is illegal and dangerous.<sup>9</sup>



## Knowing the Signs, Taking Action

If a friend or loved one has a substance use disorder, he or she may experience changes in appearance and mood, episodes of chronic dishonesty, have difficulty at work, or hang out with new friends.<sup>10</sup> If you notice a potential problem, you can help. A trusted friend or relative can provide support and help you approach someone you suspect has a substance use disorder.

To speak with your friends about a problem:

- **Sit them down** individually in a private place.
- **Start with positive reinforcement** and explain that you are talking to them because you care.
- **Offer a solution** and ideas on how they can get help, such as identifying treatment and recovery support resources in your area (see the resources listed at the end of this piece).
- **End with a plan of action.** If they resist help, keep trying.<sup>11</sup>

For additional guidance, use the resources at the end of this document.

## Understanding the Possibilities of Treatment and Recovery

Addiction is a disease that can be recovered from; treatment and recovery support services are as effective as treatments for other diseases.<sup>12</sup> Each person and his or her family can find their own path of recovery, which may include:

- Receiving medical attention through detoxification in an inpatient setting
- Focusing on improving overall health and redefining themselves
- Exploring spirituality through faith-based communities
- Changing social interactions and expanding social networks – including participating in mutual support groups
- Empowering themselves by helping others<sup>13</sup>

## Helping Yourself Through a Friend's Addiction

Even though a friend might be the one with a problem, you may experience some psychological or health stresses – all because someone you care about suffers from an addiction.<sup>14</sup> The following resources can help families through this time:

- Al-Anon or Alateen – <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org> – Offers support for friends and family members who know someone with an alcohol dependence
- Families Anonymous – <http://www.familiesanonymous.org> – Helps concerned relatives and friends whose lives have been adversely affected by a loved one's addiction; also offers online support meetings

For a longer version of this guide for friends of those with a substance use disorder, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the “Recovery Month Kit,” and click on the “Targeted Outreach” link. Information about treatment and special services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment options and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

## Online Treatment and Recovery Support

- SAMHSA’s “Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment” Web site – <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/> – Lists a range of resources about mental health, substance abuse, and treatment
- SAMHSA’s “Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online” Webcast – <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/2008/multimedia/w.aspx?ID=503> – Examines how technology has revamped the field of substance use disorder prevention and addiction treatment
- Check Yourself – <http://www.checkyourself.org> – Designed to help young adults on issues related to addiction
- The Sober Recovery Community – <http://www.soberrecovery.com/forums> – Offers support forums for people in recovery, as well as family and friends
- eGetGoing – <http://www.egetgoing.com> – Helps people new to recovery through online support groups led by certified counselors
- SAMHSA’s National Helpline – **1-800-662-HELP** – A 24-hour service, available in English and Spanish, which helps people suffering from addiction and their families find available treatment support and other resources in local areas

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“I truly believe that the resources that were made available to me should be available to anyone...”

*Aaron Kucharski*

Approximately five times more people look for information online about alcohol and drug problems than those who receive in-person specialty treatment.

**SOURCE:** Fox, Susannah. *Online Health Searches 2006*. Pew Internet and American Life Project, October 29, 2006, pp. i, 4.

**SOURCE:** *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, p. 77.

# THE INTERNET

## The Internet's Role in Substance Use Disorders and Recovery Support

Two decades ago, when **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** first began, the world was a different place. The Internet had not yet emerged as a common resource for information on any topic, much less about substance use disorders. Additionally, barriers such as a lack of transportation in rural areas were more likely to keep people from accessing treatment services than they are today, thanks in part to the emergence of the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind, this guide will help you, your friends, family, and members of your community take better advantage of the resources available online. The following sections outline how the Internet can be a helpful tool, the steps you can take to use it most effectively to find support, and the challenges it presents – and what you can do to help.

This information is provided as part of **Recovery Month**, which is supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Each September, **Recovery Month** asks communities nationwide to encourage improved access to treatment services, support people with substance use disorders and their families and celebrate those in recovery, along with their families, friends, and treatment providers.

### The Opportunities: How the Internet Can Help People in Need

As you use the Internet as a resource to help yourself or someone in need, remember that:

- Addiction is a disease that should be treated like any other health problem, and recovery can come in many forms.<sup>2,3</sup>
- The Internet can help foster a holistic and recovery-oriented approach to overcome substance use disorders that uses a wide range of age-, gender-, culturally, faith-based, and drug-appropriate services to help people recover physically, mentally, and spiritually.

However, many people who need treatment do not receive it, sometimes because they are afraid others in their community or workplace would have a negative opinion of them.<sup>4</sup> Yet in reality, less than one-fifth of people said in a recent survey that they would think less of a friend or relative if they discovered that person is in recovery from addiction.<sup>5</sup> In light of these misconceptions, many people find comfort in the anonymity of the Internet:

- Approximately five times more people look for information online about alcohol and drug problems than those who receive in-person specialty treatment.<sup>6,7</sup>
- Research suggests that treatment satisfaction is the same whether treatment is provided via Internet-based counseling or through on-site group counseling. In fact, some people prefer Internet-based services because of convenience and increased confidentiality.<sup>8</sup>



## How to Use the Internet to Get Help

Ask yourself the following questions before jumping into a particular online community or recommending it to others:

- **What kind of information is required to join the community?** Carefully review a Web site's privacy policy to ensure that information is not distributed to third parties.
- **Can I see my loved one or myself fitting in?** Look at the types of responses and support provided by others in the group.
- **What kind of oversight does the group have?** Check to see if licensed treatment and recovery counselors actively oversee the conversation and participate in it.
- **Does the Web site offer additional, offline resources?** Some sites offer helplines or other resources where you can interact with people offline as well.

Online resources to help cope with a substance use disorder can be found at the end of this document.

## The Challenges of the Online World for People With Substance Use Disorders

Although the Internet can be a positive resource, some people are using it to share new trends and methods of substance use and to obtain drugs; prescription drugs are among the most popular substances discussed online. In 2008, 365 Web sites advertised or offered controlled prescription drugs for sale online; 85 percent of these did not require a prescription.<sup>9</sup>

Videos and other online resources specifically draw attention to how to misuse over-the-counter (OTC) medicines:

- In 2006, about 3.1 million people aged 12 to 25 (or 5.3 percent of the population) said they had used OTC cough and cold medications to get high during their lifetimes.<sup>10</sup>
- People use social networking sites, such as MySpace, <http://www.myspace.com>, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com>, LiveJournal, <http://www.livejournal.com>, and Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com>, to post detailed instructions, conversations, and videos of youths misusing cough medicine.<sup>11</sup>

If you suspect that someone you know has a problem with alcohol and/or drugs, talk with that person about any online habits. If you share a computer, look at your Web browser's history to find out if the sites visited include ideas about how to misuse various substances. Even if you do not share a computer, raise the subject and encourage them to be open with you about their experiences. Do your part to help them get the treatment and support they need.

At the same time, if you are planning **Recovery Month** events, use the Internet to help you promote this initiative. Add a link to the **Recovery Month** Web site at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> to your electronic "signature," use online forums to organize **Recovery Month** events, and link to the **Recovery Month** site from your own.

For a longer version of this guide, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the "Recovery Month Kit," and click on the "Targeted Outreach" link. Information on treatment options and special services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the **Recovery Month** Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

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- SAMHSA's "Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online" Webcast – <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/2008/multimedia/w.aspx?ID=503> – Examines how technology has revamped the field of substance use disorder prevention and addiction treatment
- The Sober Recovery Community – <http://www.soberrecovery.com/forums> – Offers support forums for people in recovery, as well as family and friends
- Sober.com – <http://www.sober.com/forums/default.html> – Provides message boards for people in recovery and also provides recovery coaching from professional counselors
- Cyber Recovery Fellowship – <http://www.cyberrecovery.net/forums> – Offers faith-based forums for people in recovery
- eGetGoing – <http://www.egetgoing.com> – Helps people new to recovery through online support groups led by certified counselors
- Shouting Inside – <http://www.shoutinginside.com> – Helps young people who misuse substances share their stories and struggles with like-minded young people

Another important resource is SAMHSA's National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP**, for toll-free information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, 24 hours a day.

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“I am someone with a lot to offer.  
Through recovery, I was given the  
chance to prove that.”

*Charlie Yetman*

Nearly three-quarters of the population believe that recovery from addiction to marijuana, prescription drugs, and alcohol is possible and 58 percent view recovery from addiction to other illicit drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, as attainable.

**SOURCE:** CARAVAN® Survey for SAMHSA on Addictions and Recovery Fact Sheet, 2008, p. 2.

# GUIDE TO HELP MEDIA

## A Guide to Help Media Accurately Cover Substance Use Disorders

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, recognizes that today's media environment is pressured by tight deadlines and a reduced number of staff members who are covering several beats.<sup>1</sup> Journalists often lack the time to adequately research some topics, such as addiction, before finalizing stories – and it may be hard to keep up with the advances that have been made over the last 20 years in understanding the disease and how to read it.

At the same time, failing to report the serious issues surrounding alcohol and drug use inadvertently contributes to myths about addiction, treatment, and recovery, and potentially influences risky behavior.<sup>2</sup> The media plays a critical role in shaping perceptions about the risks and realities of addiction.<sup>3</sup> By conveying the truth about addiction and the reality of effective treatment and recovery support, the media can serve as a catalyst for people and their families who are seeking support, and diminish the misconceptions associated with addiction and treatment.

In light of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** and its 2009 theme, **“Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal,”** we are providing the following basic facts about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery. These facts will support the media

in dispelling the most common misconceptions about addiction.

**MYTH:** Addiction is a personal choice, a character flaw.

**FACT:** Drug addiction is a brain disease. Each drug changes how the brain functions in a specific way, and these changes have a powerful influence on all aspects of a person's behavior. A person's drug use can go from voluntary to compulsive – making alcohol or drugs the greatest motivator in his or her existence.

**SOURCE:** Myths About Drug Abuse & Treatment, The Partnership for Drug-Free America Web site: [http://www.drugfree.org/Intervention/WhereStart/13\\_Myths\\_About\\_Drug\\_Abuse](http://www.drugfree.org/Intervention/WhereStart/13_Myths_About_Drug_Abuse).

### The Truth About Substance Use Disorders, Treatment, and Recovery

A substance use disorder, like many chronic illnesses – diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma – is a disease that can affect anyone.<sup>4</sup> There is no one-size-fits-all approach to treatment, but addiction can be successfully managed.<sup>5</sup> Like

other conditions, it can require more than one round of treatment.<sup>6</sup>

People experience recovery in different ways. Some recover on their own; others recover through treatment and/or the assistance of self-help, mutual-aid groups, or medication-assisted therapies. Over the past few years, providers, researchers, and others have focused on holistic and recovery-oriented approaches to overcome substance use disorders. These use a wide range of age-, gender-, culturally, faith-, and drug-appropriate services to help people recover not just physically, but mentally and spiritually as well.<sup>7</sup> Whether in a hospital, rehabilitation facility, self-help support group, or other treatment and recovery center, 3.9 million people aged 12 or older received some form of treatment for a problem related to alcohol or drug use in the past year.<sup>8,9</sup>



# JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

**MYTH:** The public's attitudes toward people with substance use disorders have no effect on whether they get help.

**FACT:** Some of the top reasons people gave during the years 2004 through 2007 for not receiving treatment for alcohol or illicit drug dependence included worries about possible negative effects on one's job (11.6 percent) and concerns that receiving treatment might cause neighbors and the community to have a negative opinion of the person (11.1 percent).

**SOURCE:** Myths About Drug Abuse & Treatment, The Partnership for Drug-Free America Web site: [http://www.drugfree.org/Intervention/WhereStart/13\\_Myths\\_About\\_Drug\\_Abuse](http://www.drugfree.org/Intervention/WhereStart/13_Myths_About_Drug_Abuse).

However, people sometimes encounter barriers to obtaining treatment and recovery support services. During the years 2004 through 2007, 35.9 percent of people who made an effort to obtain treatment did not receive it due to a lack of health insurance coverage and the inability to afford it.<sup>10</sup> Nearly three-quarters of the population believe that recovery from addiction to marijuana, prescription drugs, and alcohol is possible and 58 percent view recovery from addiction to other illicit drugs, such as heroin or cocaine, as attainable. With this in mind, media should convey the value of support and treatment to help communities acknowledge the power of recovery.<sup>11</sup>

## Reporting About Substance Use Disorders and Recovery

Keep the following points in mind when reporting about a person's story or the general issues that surround substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery:

- Despite some of the myths around addiction, it is a real disease – similar to asthma or diabetes – and can be treated and successfully managed over time.
- Addiction ripples throughout the country. It is a multi-faceted disease that affects not only the individual, but one's family, friends, and the community at large.
- Stories about addiction, treatment, and recovery are real, and such issues can cause families and loved ones personal, emotional, and health struggles.
- There is no silver-bullet approach to treatment and recovery. Each person's treatment and recovery process is unique to his or her individual needs.
- Help is available, and media should remind readers and listeners about SAMHSA's 24-hour National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP**, for information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish.

Include these angles in your coverage to reduce the number of myths associated with addiction, treatment, and recovery.

For a longer version of this guide for media, please visit <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, locate the "Recovery Month Kit," and click on the "Targeted Outreach" link. Information about treatment options and special services in your area can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment options and additional treatment resources, as well as by calling 1-800-662-HELP. Web sites or event examples mentioned in this document and on the *Recovery Month* Web site are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS, SAMHSA, or CSAT.

## Resources for Reporters

The following resources can be used as a reference when constructing articles or broadcast stories about this health topic.

- **Information about substance use and treatment** – The “Overview,” “Treatment and Recovery,” and “Commonly Misused Substances” documents at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>
- **Personal treatment and recovery stories and experiences** – The *Recovery Month* Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, or Faces and Voices of Recovery at <http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org>

For additional facts, please refer to the following government sources:

- SAMHSA’s *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* – <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm>
- SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment – <http://www.csat.samhsa.gov>
- SAMHSA’s “Accessing Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Online” Webcast – <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/2008/multimedia/w.aspx?ID=503>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) – <http://www.nida.nih.gov>

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“It was residential treatment that started me on this life learning process...I’ve changed how I act and perceive myself.”

*Jared Hamre*

In 2007, an estimated 93.6 percent of people with substance use disorders who needed treatment did not receive it *because they felt they did not need it.*

SOURCE: *Results From the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, p. 81, Figure 7.7.





WWW.RECOVERYMONTH.GOV