

Drafting and Submitting an Op-Ed

Secure an op-ed, placed opposite the editorial page of your local newspaper, to help people with substance use disorders, their family and friends, and your community. Op-eds educate people about the disease, inspire them to rally for treatment options, and promote recovery. Articles celebrating ***National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)*** and its 20th anniversary can be written by local experts and leaders, people affected by substance use disorders, or other concerned community members.

This section provides op-ed writing and placement tips. Showcase this year's ***Recovery Month*** theme, "***Join the Voices for Recovery: Together We Learn, Together We Heal,***" to educate people and their families about the realities of addiction and the positive effects that treatment and recovery have on individuals and their loved ones. Use your op-ed to highlight the power and value of community support for those in recovery and the many who are still in need of treatment.

Tips for Writing Your Op-Ed

Plan your op-ed around a single point to generate the most impact; emphasize that main idea throughout the op-ed, advancing the message with additional, localized information to back up your point. Do not be afraid to reiterate your main idea – if you think you over-emphasized it, you probably wrote a convincing op-ed.

- **Take a side** on the topic. Make strong statements about your beliefs on the issue.
- **Support your case and make it relevant** with evidence. Strengthen your op-ed by referencing current facts and news events that illustrate the force this issue has on your town or community. Check for recent stories in your local paper about issues related to addiction, and consult the ***Recovery Month*** planning partners at "**Planning Partners,**" listed under the "**Resources**" tab on <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, for resources that are pertinent to your local area.
- **Liven it up** using short, compelling words. Newspapers are written at a fifth-grade reading level. Keep the piece focused by picking your words carefully. Ideally, an op-ed should be under 700 words.
- **Include your areas of expertise** at the end of the op-ed. At the end, note your full name and a brief description of yourself and what you do. These details explain why you are an expert on the subject. Also, include your personal contact information with your submission, as many papers call to verify your information before printing an op-ed.
- Refer to the **op-ed template** at the end of this document and adapt it to fit your topic and position. Remember to modify the template to address your experiences and expertise.



Tools to Make Your Outreach More Efficient

Take advantage of the resources available to help you localize and customize your op-ed and underscore why local media should run your op-ed during **Recovery Month**. Please note that local information is available for many metropolitan areas; if you do not have access to local statistics, use national numbers to make your case. Consult the following sources:

- Your Single-State Agency (SSA) – Found in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA’s) **National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)** – <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm>
- SAMHSA’s **National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services (N-SSATS)** – <http://oas.samhsa.gov/DASIS.htm#NSSATS>
- SAMHSA’s **Treatment Episode Data Set** – <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov/DASIS.htm#TEDS2>
- SAMHSA’s **Drug Abuse Warning Network** – <http://www.dawninfo.samhsa.gov>

Getting It Published in Traditional Media Outlets

- **Practice makes perfect.** Have some key points ready and practice your conversation before calling the editorial page editor to encourage the publication of your op-ed. When you do call, start by saying that you want to submit an op-ed to be published during **Recovery Month** in September. Ask for the specific guidelines for submissions, such as word count and deadlines, as well as suggestions on topics of interest that may improve the likelihood of your op-ed being published.
- **Follow the guidelines.** Newspapers have preferences for op-ed submissions, such as receiving them via e-mail or fax. Note these guidelines and follow them strictly. With your submission, include a cover letter detailing the importance of the op-ed, explaining how the topic relates to the readers and to the well-being of your community as a whole. In the cover letter, refer to any previous contact you made with the editor or to recent news stories the paper has published about substance use disorders.
- **Follow up.** Call the editor about one week after you submit your op-ed. This week will allow the editor time to review the piece, and your call will confirm they received it. Offer to answer any questions the editor has and be willing to modify the piece if the editor has reservations about publishing it.

Submitting Your Op-Ed to Online Media

- **Contact the Web site editors of local media outlets.** In addition to speaking with the editorial page editor at your local publications, reach out to the Web site's managing editor. Occasionally, newspaper Web sites will publish content that is not in the newspaper, giving you an additional forum to deliver your point of view and an opportunity to link to the *Recovery Month* Web site.
- **Search for online news sites about civic events.** Many towns, cities, and communities have Web sites dedicated to what is going on around them. Check your local newspaper's Web site to see if they link to other community sites that provide information about area events. E-mail those sites to introduce yourself first, then offer your op-ed as a guest article to highlight your *Recovery Month* events for the community.

Share Your Activities and Successes

Promote your activities and share the success of your *Recovery Month* events by:

- Posting your *Recovery Month* plans on <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> to generate momentum for the campaign, which touches millions of people affected by substance use disorders.
- Completing the "Customer Satisfaction Form" to share your stories and other outreach efforts during *Recovery Month*.
- **Sending your 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

More Resources on *Recovery Month* and Substance Use Disorders

Various resources exist about *Recovery Month* and substance use disorders:

- All materials from this planning toolkit and an extensive array of relevant information are available electronically at the *Recovery Month* Web site, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.
- Substance use disorder, treatment, and recovery information is available at SAMHSA's Web site, <http://www.samhsa.gov>, and by calling SAMHSA's 24-hour national helpline, **1-800-662-HELP**, for information in English and Spanish.
- Information on treatment options in your area and the special services available can be found at <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, a portal that includes a searchable database of more than 11,000 U.S. treatment facilities and additional treatment resources.

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 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

Approximately 559 words

Let's Learn Together How to Help and Heal People With Substance Use Disorders

Substance use disorders are treatable diseases, and when they are properly addressed, those affected can lead productive, healthy lives. Yet people in our community mistakenly believe that abusing alcohol or drugs is a personal weakness, not a medical illness.

The truth is that addiction is a medical condition that should be treated like any other illness. The 2008 expansion of the **Mental Health Parity Act of 1996**, which provides equity in the coverage of mental health and substance use disorders, proves we have made many strides. We must continue to collaborate to educate people about addiction and the benefits of treatment and recovery by sharing this message online and offline.

Having **[been in recovery for X years / worked in the recovery field for X years / other statement of personal experience]**, I have firsthand knowledge of this reality. Addiction is a real issue, with an estimated 23.2 million people needing treatment for an alcohol or illicit drug use problem in 2007. Locally, **[number]** people needed treatment last year in **[city/state]**. Yet not enough enter treatment or access recovery services. In fact, only 3.9 million people nationwide received some kind of treatment for an alcohol- or drug-related problem in 2007; millions of others did not get help, partly due to shame relating to their addiction.

This September in celebration of the 20th annual **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, an initiative of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and its Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, I call on everyone in **[community]** to educate others about this disease and encourage access to treatment and recovery services in our area. We can give teachers resources to support children who need help for their own or a family member's addiction; open communication lines through our everyday social and work interactions; and provide the media with up-to-date, accurate scientific information about addiction, treatment, and recovery to dispel the myths.

We also can do this online. According to the **Pew Internet & American Life Project**, approximately 75 percent of adult Americans use the Internet to search for health information online and indicate that the Internet is a great medium for educating our community about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery. To maximize this opportunity, I urge local businesses, government agencies, and community organizations to showcase details about local treatment and recovery resources on their Web sites and link to additional information available at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>.





JOIN THE VOICES FOR RECOVERY

The Internet can help people find treatment and recovery resources. Some useful sites include SAMHSA's Treatment Locator, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, the SAMHSA **Access to Recovery** program, <http://www.atr.samhsa.gov>, and the Recovery Community Services Program, <http://www.rcsp.samhsa.gov>.

Additionally, the Internet provides a safe haven for people who may be afraid to publicly voice their struggle with a substance use disorder. They may find support and treatment services through social networking sites, chat rooms, and organization listserves: resources that remind them that they are not alone. These online tools also may direct people to valuable face-to-face support meetings. Another important resource is SAMHSA's 24-hour national helpline for information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish, **1-800-662-HELP**.

Addiction affects our entire community. Together we can help people, families, and our community – together we can learn about addiction and begin to heal.