

POLICYMAKER'S GUIDE FOR ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL DISORDERS

Substance use disorders—which include misuse, dependence, or addiction to alcohol and/or legal or illegal drugs—and mental health problems—which include depression, anxiety disorder, mood disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and others—are major public health concerns in the United States, but prevention and treatment services are available and effective. In 2010, Congress passed and President Obama signed the Affordable Care Act, expanding health care coverage to approximately 32 million Americans who were not previously insured. The Affordable Care Act gives Americans more freedom and control over their health care, as well as new benefits that ensure people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost.¹ This legislation, along with the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA), includes many provisions that aim to improve coverage for and access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services for substance use and mental disorders.

Local, State, and Federal policymakers are the primary funders of treatment and recovery support services, and therefore are critical in conveying that recovery from substance use and mental disorders is possible and benefits the entire community socially and economically. Policymakers are instrumental in reducing barriers to treatment and recovery support services to build a healthier, safer, and more productive community, as well as reducing the prejudice and discrimination faced by individuals with these conditions in our country.

Every year, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) within the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sponsors **National Recovery Month: Prevention Works, Treatment is Effective, People Recover (Recovery Month)**. The campaign, which takes place each September, raises awareness that behavioral health is an essential part of health and one's overall wellness, and that substance use and mental disorders are treatable and people can and do recover. **Recovery Month** stresses that all individuals have the fundamental and inherent value to be accepted and treated with respect, dignity, and worth. The observance celebrates people in recovery, and those who work in the treatment and recovery field. **Recovery Month** supports several of SAMHSA's Strategic Initiatives, particularly the goals of increasing public awareness of substance use and mental disorders, health reform implementation, and offering recovery support through an individual, program, and system approach. This year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Recovery Benefits Everyone,"** emphasizes that:

- All Americans have the opportunity to access provisions within the Affordable Care Act and Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act (MHPAEA), aimed to improve physical and emotional health while ensuring people will receive the care they need at a more reasonable cost.
- Public awareness will increase access for those in need of essential substance use and mental health treatment and recovery support services, including behavioral health treatment.
- These legislative changes will improve the overall health and well-being of people in the United States.

The passage of the MHPAEA provides parity, or the recognition by insurance services—both public and private—that substance use and mental disorders are treated comparably to other physical health and medical conditions.²

The societal cost of addiction is estimated at over \$121 billion annually³ and the annual indirect cost of mental illnesses is estimated to be at least \$79 billion.⁴ Fortunately, in 2009, 4.3 million people aged 12 or older received help for substance use disorders⁵ and 30.2 million adults aged 18 or older received services for mental health problems.⁶ By investing in and empowering people to seek treatment, recovery support services, and mental health services, this societal cost can be significantly reduced and even more people get the treatment and recovery supports they need.⁷

This document will help policymakers understand the rewards of access to treatment and recovery services as a result of health reform and parity. It also will highlight the prevalence of substance use and mental disorders; the return on investment that treatment and recovery services have on the overall health, productivity, and financial standing of a community; and will provide suggestions for addressing substance use and mental disorders in their jurisdictions.



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Growing up, I had everything going for me—I was an honor student, cheerleader, athlete, and student council member. But even though my father is dependent on alcohol and I swore I wouldn't follow in his footsteps, I started using alcohol and drugs at age 13. I believed I was different and I could control it.

I thought I was controlling it until age 32, when I finally hit bottom with no job, no car, and no home. I called my sister, who was already in recovery, and with her support went to a 6-month treatment program. Since achieving recovery, I have returned to school, received my bachelor's degree, and became a certified addictions professional. I opened my own treatment center in July 2010.

Today, I define myself as a wife, daughter, grandmother, and business owner, as well as a person in recovery for 17 years. Despite the hardships I've faced, I love my life and wouldn't trade anything I have been through. My experience has made me more determined to succeed and a better counselor to my clients, whose experiences I can understand firsthand.

In my professional life, I have conducted research on how to best treat criminal offenders with substance use disorders and how to avoid re-offenses. I have shared my story with Congress to promote the effectiveness of treatment, the possibility of recovery, and the need for adequate funding of services. I work daily to help others get better and live honest, productive lives. Last year, as part of **Recovery Month**, I was honored to be chosen as the Florida A&E Recovery Delegate and participated in a walk in Philadelphia and spoke at my hometown walk in Orlando.

Expanding Access to Treatment and Recovery Services

The Affordable Care Act, along with the MHPAEA, aims to improve coverage for and access to prevention and essential services for substance use and/or mental disorders. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, health care coverage will expand to approximately 32 million Americans who were not previously insured.⁸

When the Affordable Care Act is fully implemented in 2014, State Health Insurance Exchanges will provide individual and small businesses with an insurance marketplace. This "one-stop-shop" will help consumers find and compare affordable, high-quality health insurance options. Exchanges will bring new transparency to the market so that consumers will be able to compare plans based on price and quality.⁹

SAMHSA's Health Reform **Strategic Initiative** supports and promotes the increased need for affordable health care coverage, access to appropriate high-quality and integrated care, and a reduction of disparities that currently exist between the availability of services for substance use and mental disorders, and other medical conditions. Information about prevention, treatment, and recovery services for substance use and mental disorders, as well as referral to these services, is available by calling **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD), as well as visiting <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>. For further information on how the health reform law affects access to health care, visit the Federal website, <http://www.HealthCare.gov>. Additional resources are provided at the end of this document.

Prevalence of Substance Use and Mental Disorders in the United States

Substance use and mental disorders affect millions of people nationwide—including members of the United States Congress, mayors, and council members. In the United States in 2009, among adults aged 18 or older, 20.8 million people were classified with a substance use disorder,¹⁰ 45 million people were classified with a mental health problem,¹¹ and 8.9 million people had co-occurring substance use disorders and mental health problems.¹² Substance use and mental disorders don't discriminate and affect people of all ages, races, genders, workplaces, geographies, and socioeconomic levels.

Continued use of alcohol and/or drugs over a long period of time can lead to other chronic illnesses, impacting the overall health. For example, alcohol and/or drug misuse can be associated with organ damage¹³ as well as cirrhosis of the liver.¹⁴ Drug misuse is also associated with many of our Nation's most common and costly medical problems, including cancer, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS.¹⁵ Each year, approximately 40 million illnesses or injuries occur among Americans as the result of their substance use disorder.¹⁶

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately one in four adults, or 26.2 percent of all Americans aged 18 and older, suffer from a diagnosable mental health problem in a given year.¹⁷ Fortunately, with a combination of medication, therapy, and other support services, between 70 and 90 percent of individuals with a mental health problem have significantly reduced their symptoms and improved the quality of their lives.¹⁸

Policymakers, along with family and social service workers, are instrumental in solving this immense problem and improving the lives of those in their communities. It is important they represent all individuals in their community and raise awareness of the benefits of supporting treatment and recovery services.

The Value of Investing in Treatment—How Recovery Benefits Everyone

Substance use disorders can be effectively treated, just like many other illnesses that affect one's physical and mental health.¹⁹ Investing in treatment is both necessary and valuable. According to several conservative estimates, every \$1 invested in substance use treatment programs yields a return of between \$4 and \$7 in reduced drug-related crime, criminal justice costs, and theft. When savings related to health care are included, total savings can exceed costs by a ratio of 12 to 1.²⁰ Similarly, treatment for mental health problems works. Research has shown that after 3 weeks of treatment at a mental health outpatient program, the work impairment of employees living with mental health problems was cut nearly in half, from 31 percent to 18 percent.²¹ Increasing access to substance use and mental health treatment and recovery support can successfully help:

- **Cut medical costs** – A study found that individuals with a substance use or mental disorder had average health care costs that were \$1,766 higher than costs for individuals without these conditions.²² However, with treatment, these medical costs can decrease significantly. For example, after individuals received treatment in an integrated primary care and substance use setting, total medical costs per patient per month were more than halved, from \$431 to \$200.²³
- **Improve productivity** – Lost productivity due to substance use and mental disorders significantly impacts businesses. Alcohol problems alone cost employers nearly \$134 billion in lost productivity, mostly due to absenteeism and poor work performance.²⁴ Mental health problems cost the United States approximately \$63 billion annually due to loss of productivity at the workplace and each year 217 million workdays are completely or partially lost due to mental health problems.²⁵ Through treatment and recovery support services, absenteeism, health care claims, and accidents will decrease, while productivity will increase.²⁶
- **Reduce child abuse and foster care rates** – Between 50 and 80 percent of all child abuse and neglect cases involve some degree of substance misuse by the child's parent.²⁷ Research shows that children whose families receive needed and appropriate alcohol and drug treatment are less likely to remain in foster care.²⁸ Parents with mental health problems can have a significant negative impact on their family's stability. For example, lower marriage and higher divorce rates than the general population are common among families that have one or two parents suffering from a mental health problem. However, treatment for mental health problems is effective and long-term intervention programs are available that address the needs of the whole family.²⁹

- **Decrease homelessness** – Approximately two-thirds of homeless people living in the United States have co-occurring substance use and mental disorders. Research has shown many homeless people do not seek treatment because of their unstable lifestyle. However, modified therapeutic communities, which often take place in shelters and address educational, vocational, legal, and housing needs, are cost efficient and an effective treatment option for the homeless.³⁰

Treatment is associated with major reductions in substance use, reductions in costs to society, and improved patient recovery.³¹ In 2009, 4.3 million people aged 12 or older received treatment for substance use disorders,³² and 30.2 million adults aged 18 or older received services for mental health problems,³³ beginning their quest to live a more productive and healthy life. Overall, individuals in recovery from a substance use and mental disorders will experience:

- Improved relationships;^{34, 35}
- More time and energy for the people and activities they care about;³⁶
- Better problem solving skills;³⁷ and
- The ability to live and work independently.³⁸

SAMHSA supports a recovery-oriented systems of care (ROSC), which stress the importance of a personal recognition of the need for change and transformation to sustain recovery. ROSC also acknowledges that there are many pathways to recovery and that while service types may vary, all recovery support services should offer choice, honor an individual's potential for growth, focus on a person's strengths, and attend to the individual's overall health and well-being.³⁹ Additionally, many individuals in treatment and recovery say they became more active, self-reliant, and involved in their communities because they have a clear purpose and improved well-being, including mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health.⁴⁰

How to Help Your Community

As the primary allocators of funding for prevention and treatment services for substance use and mental disorders, policymakers have enormous potential and obligation to help their communities. State governments spend more than 13 percent of their budgets on problems related to alcohol and/or drug use. Less than 4 percent of this funding is spent on prevention and treatment, while more than 96 percent pays for the social, health, and criminal costs related to substance use disorders.⁴¹ According to the [National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors](#), 2010 spending for mental health services fell nearly 5 percent compared with 2009.⁴² While State budgets across the country are dealing with shortages, policymakers still have the opportunity to make treatment and recovery a priority.

Policymakers, and all elected officials, need to provide leadership and develop strategies to prevent and address substance use and mental disorders.⁴³ Policymakers should strive to create prevention-prepared communities where individuals, families, schools, college campuses, workplaces, and communities take action to promote emotional health and prevent and reduce substance use and mental disorders, and suicide across the lifespan. This will support one of SAMHSA's [Strategic Initiatives](#) focused on prevention of substance use and mental disorders.

As an elected official or policymaker you can help by taking the following steps:

- **Implement treatment interventions in the criminal justice system** ranging from pretrial diversion to sentencing alternatives to probation and parole programs that require participation in substance use or mental health treatment. For example, in 2010, approximately 2,500 drug courts served over 120,000 people.⁴⁴ Drug courts closely supervise individuals for at least one year, during which they receive intensive treatment support and obtain regular and random drug testing. Research shows these courts are effective in reducing societal costs and rates of substance use.⁴⁵ Nationwide, 75 percent of drug court graduates remain arrest-free at least two years after leaving the program.⁴⁶ Mental health courts also can be implemented to assist and encourage those with mental health problems to obtain treatment services.⁴⁷ To qualify, participants generally have an active criminal charge and a mental health diagnosis such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or anxiety, and can include co-occurring disorders.⁴⁸

- **Inform your constituents on health reform** and its effect on access to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. Once fully implemented, the legislation will expand coverage to approximately 32 million Americans who were not previously insured, thus it is vital the general public understands how to seek services they may need.⁴⁹ Refer to the “[Fast Facts About Health Reform, Substance Use and Mental Disorders, Treatment and Recovery](#)” document in this toolkit for additional information about health reform and how the provisions will affect access to substance use and mental health treatment, recovery, and other recovery support services in your community.
- **Issue a proclamation** to raise awareness of substance use and mental disorders in your community or State. The proclamation can highlight significant issues that affect your constituents, including how health reform and the MHPAEA affects treatment and recovery support services, and the financial costs of not investing in treatment and recovery support services. Refer to the “[Official Recovery Month Proclamations](#)” document in the “[Media Outreach](#)” section of this toolkit for a sample proclamation template that you can tailor.
- **Attend a Recovery Month event** to show your solidarity and support for the cause. This could be an event to showcase a proclamation or an opportunity to speak to constituents about how you are supporting the recovery community.
- **Plan a public policy forum** or roundtable to raise awareness of substance use and mental disorders and the negative impact they have on communities throughout the United States. Refer to the “[Press Materials for your Recovery Month Event](#)” document in this toolkit for a sample press release and media advisory for a roundtable event. Be sure to also review the “[Promoting Recovery Month with Events](#)” document for tips on planning a successful event this September.
- **Work collaboratively with other national, State, and local leaders** to educate your community on how prevention and treatment can be beneficial through implementing substance use or mental health advisory State boards. To be successful, these boards should be led by civic leaders, like yourself, who have the ability to gain public awareness and support—a SAMHSA [Strategic Initiative](#). Membership in these coalitions should include a network of local coalitions and recovery organizations that are aware of the landscape of substance use and mental disorders nationally and locally, and can provide valuable insight to the prevention, treatment, and recovery field. Refer to the “[Building Community Coalitions](#)” document in this toolkit for information on how to create successful partnership with other groups and individuals across the country that share your mission.

To support SAMHSA's [Strategic Initiatives](#), it is essential to speak out to the public so that all people—regardless of their age, race, gender, workplace, geography, or socioeconomic level—are aware of the prevention, treatment, and recovery services available to them and the benefits of accessing these services. Through your work, SAMHSA hopes that individuals will seek assistance for substance use and mental disorders with the same urgency as they would with any other health condition.

Additional Recovery Resources

A variety of resources provide additional information on [Recovery Month](#), substance use and mental disorders, and prevention, treatment, and recovery services. Use the toll-free numbers and websites below to increase your knowledge and seek guidance from professionals. Through these resources, individuals can interact with others and find support on an as-needed, confidential basis.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Website** – Leads efforts to reduce the impact of substance use and mental disorders on communities nationwide.
- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357), or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)** – Provides 24-hour free and confidential information about substance use and mental disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **SAMHSA's “Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment” Website** – Contains information about all treatment options and special services located in your area.
- **Single-State Agency Directory** – Included in the [Recovery Month](#) toolkit and lists State agencies that plan, implement, and evaluate substance use and mental disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

- **SAMHSA's ADS Center** – Provides information and assistance to develop successful efforts to counteract prejudice and discrimination and promote social inclusion.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)** – Provides a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD)** – Contains research, public policy statements, and effective alcohol and/or drug prevention and treatment programs for those in need.
- **National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP)** – Includes an abundance of information on drug courts and an interactive map to locate a specific adult, juvenile, tribal, family, veteran, Federal, or reentry drug court.
- **American Psychiatric Association (APA)** – Works to ensure humane care and effective treatment is given to anyone with mental health problems, including intellectual disability and substance use disorders.
- **National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD)** – Represents the \$34 billion public mental health service delivery system serving 6.3 million people annually in all 50 States, 4 territories, and the District of Columbia.

As health reform continues to be implemented, use the following resources to learn about the impact of these changes on access to treatment and recovery support services for substance use and mental disorders:

- **HealthCare.gov** – Managed by HHS, this Federal website provides information for the general public, people with disabilities, seniors, young adults, and employers, on how the law affects access to health care, insurance options, available preventive services, and comparing care quality.
- **Kaiser Family Foundation** – Issued by a nonprofit, health policy and communications group, this document provides a summary on the comprehensive health reform law, the Affordable Care Act, signed into law on March 23, 2010. The document discusses the law and subsequent changes, provisions to expand coverage, control health care costs, and improve the health care delivery system. Visit the Kaiser Family Foundation's [Health Reform Source](#) for more information.
- **The Parity Implementation Coalition's Parity Toolkit** – Created by organizations, including **Recovery Month** Planning Partners, this toolkit aids individuals seeking help, individuals in recovery, as well as their families, providers, and advocates in understanding their rights and benefits under the MHPAEA law.

Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the [Recovery Month website](#) does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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