# Young Adults

"I'm now 27 years old and have been in recovery for more than 5 years. In that time, I've earned my master's degree and started working toward my doctorate."

**Emily Eisenhart** 

Director, Center for Addiction Recovery, Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, Georgia Southern University Statesboro, GA Peer Support

Family

Courage

Overcome

Hope

join the voices for recovery

together

on pathways to wellness



### **YOUNG ADULTS**

Young adults are often considered to be at the prime of their lives, taking on new experiences at school, work, or other activities. However, this is also a time when mental and/or substance use disorders can arise. Although a young person may lose sight of healthy habits, it is possible to avoid these problems and receive help that can truly change the direction of a person's life.

With that in mind, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (http://www.samhsa.gov), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (http://www.hhs.gov), sponsors **National Recovery Month** (Recovery Month) each September. This observance, in its 24<sup>th</sup> year, increases awareness and understanding of the mental and substance use disorders that can affect anyone at any age. It also promotes the message that behavioral health is essential to health, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover. Young adults, or those who work to support them, can make a big difference in promoting prevention and in ensuring intervention, treatment, and recovery if warranted.

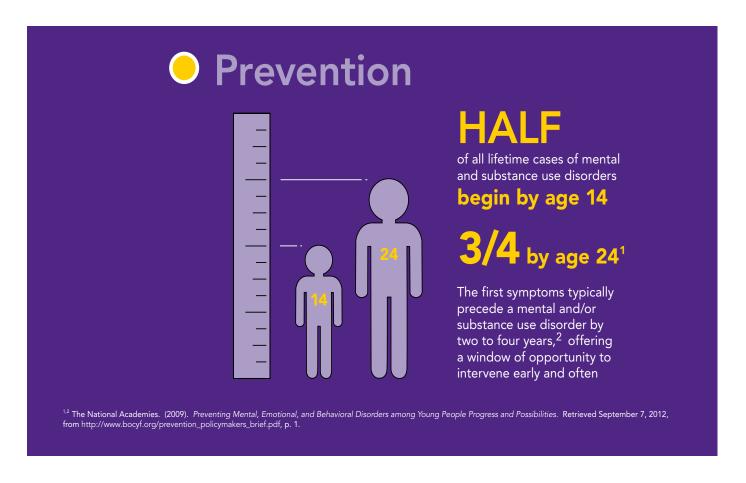
The 2013 **Recovery Month** theme, "Join the Voices for Recovery: Together on Pathways to Wellness," represents the many ways that people can prevent behavioral health issues, seek treatment, and sustain recovery as part of a commitment to living a mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy life. Because young adults are disproportionately affected by behavioral health issues, it is important to understand these issues and how to get help.

In 2011, the percentage of young adults 18 to 25 (29.8 percent) who had a mental illness was the highest among adults.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the rate of substance dependence or abuse among adults aged 18 to 25 (18.6 percent) was higher than that among youths aged 12 to 17 (6.9 percent) and among adults aged 26 or older (6.3 percent).<sup>2</sup>

Young adults are also more likely to be uninsured and therefore lack access to affordable treatment even if they look for it.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), many of these young adults will be eligible for affordable health insurance coverage that includes substance abuse and mental health services.<sup>4</sup> It is critical that these young adults know about the opportunity for coverage starting with open enrollment on October 1, 2013.

This document features ways to identify risk factors and the signs and symptoms of behavioral health conditions for young adults and details how to seek help or support others.





#### Understand Who's at Risk...

Young adults cannot afford to ignore the risk factors of behavioral health conditions. Ultimately, anyone can be at risk, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sex, religious beliefs, or sexual orientation. It is important to understand the potential factors that may contribute to behavioral health conditions. Mental illnesses may develop in people who have experienced the following situations:<sup>5</sup>

- Stressful life experiences, such as financial problems, death of a loved one, divorce;
- Abuse or neglect;
- Personal substance abuse;
- A chronic health condition, such as cancer;
- A traumatic event, such as a military deployment; and
- Having few meaningful relationships or friends.



In addition, individuals who have been exposed to certain factors may be more at risk of developing a substance use disorder. These factors include:

- Lack of parental supervision;<sup>6</sup>
- Family history of addiction;<sup>7</sup>
- History of mental illness;
- Peer pressure;<sup>8</sup>
- Anxiety, depression, or loneliness;9 and
- Stressful life experiences, such as poverty or trauma. 10, 11

### Recognize the Signs...

If someone is at risk, he or she can display early signs of behavioral health issues two to four years before the problem can be fully diagnosed. 12 It's important to take these signs seriously and not dismiss them as a normal part of growing up because early intervention is important.

Signs that someone may be experiencing a mental illness include:13

- Confusion;
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability);
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows;
- Excessive fears, worries, and anxieties;
- Social withdrawal;
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits;
- Strong feelings of anger;
- Delusions or hallucinations;
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities;
- Suicidal thoughts;
- Denial of obvious problems;
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments; and
- Substance abuse.



Signs that someone may be experiencing a problem with substance use include:14

- Bloodshot eyes and abnormally sized pupils;
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns;
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain;
- Deterioration of physical appearance;
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing;
- Tremors, slurred speech, or impaired coordination;
- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school;
- Unexplained need for money or other financial problems;
- Secretive or suspicious behaviors;
- Sudden change in friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies;
- Frequent trouble, such as fights, accidents, illegal activities;
- Unexplained change in personality or attitude;
- Sudden mood swings, irritability, or angry outbursts;
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity, agitation, or giddiness;
- Lack of motivation; and
- Appearing fearful, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason.

It is important to note that these signs may also be related to other physical illnesses and may be unrelated to a behavioral health condition. In any case, these signs should be addressed to determine the cause, allowing for young adults to get the proper support and treatment for their needs.

#### Lend a Hand...

Just like diabetes, cancer, or obesity, mental and substance use disorders can be treated. However, many young adults find it hard to accept that there is an issue or that they should seek help. It's easy to feel like you can get over a mental and/or substance use disorder quickly by "snapping out of it," or even feel ashamed about the problem. However, believing you are invincible could keep you from receiving potentially life-saving prevention, treatment, and recovery support resources. However, believed the problem of the



Support from social networks can make a difference. Consider taking the following steps to help a friend, colleague, or other peer who may have a mental and/or substance use disorder:<sup>17</sup>

- Express interest and concern;
- Ask questions, listen to ideas, and be responsive;
- Ask what you can do to help;
- Educate others so they understand the facts about behavioral health; and
- Treat the person with respect, compassion, and empathy.

Upon receiving support, young adults may elect to find private treatment options or engage with members of a group to find and share their personal pathway to wellness. There are many ways for young adults to get help and support for a mental and/or substance use disorder, including joining a support group, attending a recovery high school or collegiate recovery program, or seeking inpatient, residential, or outpatient care. It is important to know that treatment and recovery options should be tailored to the individual's characteristics and needs. For a comprehensive list of treatment options, refer to the "Treatment and Recovery" section of this toolkit.

When facing a situation that appears to be more severe or life-threatening, the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** – 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) – or SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – are available to help.

### Take a Stand on Campus...

In 2011, young adults aged 18 to 22 who were enrolled full time in college were more likely than those who were not enrolled full time to use alcohol or binge drink.<sup>18</sup> In addition, 22 percent of college students used illicit drugs in 2011.<sup>19</sup> Help discourage students and peers on your campus from getting involved in risky drinking and other harmful situations.

Most campuses offer a number of helpful resources, and students can encourage university officials to invest in additional recovery activities and workshops. Among popular programs implemented across the nation are Collegiate Recovery Communities (CRCs), which are being adopted by many colleges, according to the Association of Recovery Schools (http://www.recoveryschools.org/schools\_college.html). These programs provide a nurturing, affirming environment on campus, helping people achieve their academic, personal, and professional goals. Enrolled students at the college or university can apply to CRCs and have the opportunity to receive treatment and counseling support.<sup>20</sup>

For many, college can be a stressful time, and it often takes a toll on students' mental well-being. According to a 2011 study, 30 percent of college students reported they felt extremely depressed at least once within the last year.<sup>21</sup> Consider the following steps to help a student or peer experiencing a mental illness:<sup>22</sup>

- Consult a resident assistant or advisor who can direct you to the most appropriate options for prevention, treatment, or recovery support services;
- Approach the student with concern, not judgment, and gently suggest that he or she receive help; and
- Find out about specific meetings or support groups on campus and encourage the person to attend.



### Continue on Pathways to Wellness...

Part of wellness is being healthy in body, mind, and spirit. As you start school or a new job, it is important that you are fully fit to succeed. Young adults can pursue wellness and lead a healthy lifestyle by staying active and making safe decisions. Programs like Racing for Recovery (http://www.racingforrecovery.com) can be helpful in creating a fitness and recovery journey.

The "Join the Voices for Recovery" section of this toolkit also features the stories of young adults who have managed their mental and/or substance use disorders. These stories can be examples for young adults who are seeking prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.

# Make a Difference During *Recovery Month* and Throughout the Year...

There are many ways to help young adults, or those who work to support them, during **Recovery Month.**Consider taking the following steps:

- **Share your story.** Whether you are in recovery yourself or supporting someone you know who is in recovery, your story will inspire others to pursue recovery.
- Offer encouragement to others. Remind young adults that through prevention and treatment support services, they can be successful on their path to recovery.
- **Celebrate recovery.** If a young adult is in recovery, recognize the accomplishment and let him or her know that you are proud.

### **Additional Resources...**

A variety of resources provide additional information on **Recovery Month** and mental and/or substance use disorders, as well as prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. The toll-free numbers and websites below are available for people to share their experiences, learn from others, and seek help from professionals. Through these resources, individuals can interact with others and find support on an as-needed, confidential basis.

- **SAMHSA's Website (http://www.samhsa.gov):** Leads efforts to reduce the impact of mental and/or substance use disorders on communities nationwide.
- SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.
- SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" Website (http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment): Contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.



- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org): Provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- Association of Recovery Schools (http://www.recoveryschools.org/index.html): Advocates for the promotion, strengthening, and expansion of secondary and post-secondary programs designed for students and families committed to achieving success in both education and recovery.
- **BHBusiness (http://www.saasnet.org/bhb):** Offers targeted training and support for behavioral healthcare executives, CEOs, and directors, including health care insurance enrollment training information.
- Center for Financing Reform and Innovation (http://www.samhsa.gov/healthreform): Supports the need for information, analysis, products, and technical assistance to address significant changes in the organization and financing of behavioral health care, as well as the need to guide and support governments and people on how to most effectively and efficiently use available resources to meet the prevention, treatment and recovery support needs of the public.
- College Drinking: Changing the Culture (http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/Default.aspx):

  Provides comprehensive research-based information on issues related to alcohol abuse and binge drinking among college students, including online tools for parents, students, and administrators.
- **Healthcare.gov (http://www.healthcare.gov/index.html):** Contains information on finding health insurance options, help using insurance, information on the Affordable Care Act, help comparing providers, and information on prevention and wellness resources.
- Helping Young People Experience Recovery (HYPER) (http://www.forrecovery.org): Promotes the positive
  impact of addiction recovery in the community and the lives of individuals and families affected by the disease
  of addiction.
- **Heroes in Recovery (http://www.heroesinrecovery.com):** Celebrates the heroic efforts of those who seek help for mental illness and addiction, without feeling ashamed or isolated.
- National Council on Patient Information and Education (NCPIE) College Resource Kit
   (http://www.talkaboutrx.org/college\_resource\_kit.jsp): Informs and mobilizes college campuses
   to raise awareness about and address the misuse and abuse of prescription medicines.
- Recovery Opens Doors (http://www.recoveryopensdoors.org/index.html): Helps people talk to friends, other students, individuals, and groups in the community about prevention, treatment, and referral for mental and/or substance use disorders.
- **SMART Recovery®** (http://www.smartrecovery.org): Offers free, self-empowering, science-based mutual help groups for all types of addictive behaviors.
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) (http://www.prainc.com/soar/about/default.asp): Increases access to Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Income for eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have a mental and/or substance use disorder.



- Teen Challenge International (http://teenchallengeusa.com): Provides youth, adults, and families with effective and comprehensive faith-based solutions to life-controlling alcohol and drug problems.
- Youth Move National (http://www.youthmovenational.org): Unites the voices of individuals who have experienced various community systems, including mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare.
- Young People in Recovery (http://youngpeopleinrecovery.org): Engages individuals and entities at all levels to empower young people to find and sustain recovery.

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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