

Facts and Recommendations for State, Local, and Tribal Governments

FACING ADDICTION IN AMERICA

*The Surgeon General's Report on
Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*

How do we define substance use problems?

Substance misuse is the use of any substance in a manner, situation, amount, or frequency that can cause harm to users or to those around them. Prolonged, repeated misuse of a substance can lead to a **substance use disorder**, a medical illness that impairs health and function. Severe and chronic substance use disorders are commonly referred to as **addictions**.

Why should we be concerned about these problems?

The **yearly economic impact**
of substance misuse and
substance use disorders on
states and communities is



Source: Sacks et al., 2015; National Drug Intelligence Center, 2011

- Across the United States, individuals, families, communities, and health care systems are struggling to cope with alcohol and drug misuse and its consequences.
- Consequences of substance misuse and substance use disorders include increased alcohol- and drug-related crime and violence, motor vehicle crashes, and health care costs.
- The yearly economic impact of substance misuse and substance use disorders on states and communities is \$442 billion: \$249 billion for alcohol misuse and \$193 billion for illicit drug use.^{1,2}
- The effects of substance misuse and substance use disorders on public health make it critical for state, local, and tribal governments to take a comprehensive public health approach.

¹ Sacks et al., 2015.

² National Drug Intelligence Center, 2011.

What does it mean to take a public health approach to substance misuse and substance use disorders?

A public health framework addresses the broad social and environmental determinants of health by working collaboratively across sectors to address the many factors that influence substance misuse. It involves:

- Examining community and individual risk and protective factors for substance misuse;
- Preventing initial use of illegal substances or misuse of legal substances;
- Implementing strategies to prevent substance misuse or substance use disorders;
- Providing access to effective prevention, treatment and recovery supports;
- Implementing evidence-based policies to reduce alcohol and drug misuse;
- Expanding and training the workforce to meet the needs of individuals across service settings; and
- Engaging multiple sectors, including educators, academic institutions, researchers, policymakers, coalitions, law enforcement, emergency medical services, the criminal justice system, health care professionals, and health care systems.

What public health strategies should be implemented to address substance misuse and substance use disorders?

- Public and professional education can increase awareness that alcohol and drug use disorders are chronic brain disorders that can be effectively treated.
- Evidence-based prevention programs and policies can be delivered in states and communities to significantly reduce rates of substance misuse and related harms.
- Routine screening for alcohol and drug use should be conducted in primary care settings to identify early symptoms of a substance use disorder and engage patients in the appropriate level of care.
- Integration of substance use disorder treatment with mainstream health care can improve the quality of treatment services.
- The health and social service systems can be transformed to incorporate recovery-oriented beliefs, values, and approaches.

What can state, local, and tribal governments do to help?

- 1** *Provide leadership, guidance, and vision in supporting a science-based approach to addressing substance-related health issues.* Government agencies have a major role to play in:
 - Improving public education and awareness;
 - Monitoring public health trends;
 - Conducting research and evaluations;
 - Providing incentives, funding, and assistance to promote implementation of evidence-based prevention, treatment, and recovery practices, programs, and policies;
 - Addressing legislative and regulatory barriers;
 - Improving coordination between health care, criminal justice, and social service organizations; and
 - Fostering collaborative initiatives with the private sector (e.g., local businesses).
- 2** *Improve coordination between social service systems and the health care system to address the social and environmental factors that contribute to the risk for substance use disorders.* For example, social and peer workers can collaborate with health care systems to help patients with substance use disorders find stable housing, obtain job training or employment, and access recovery supports and other resources in the community.
- 3** *Implement criminal justice reforms to transition to a less punitive and more health-focused approach.* Prevention messages should be communicated to individuals in the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems. Evidence-based treatment services, including medications, should be made available to incarcerated individuals with substance use disorders. Law enforcement and emergency medical services should collaborate to distribute and administer naloxone to prevent opioid overdose deaths.

How can you find out more?

The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health provides evidence-based information on effective and sustainable strategies for addressing alcohol and drug problems. The Report offers hope, practical solutions, and resources for communities, which play a critical role in prevention, treatment, and recovery for those affected by substance use disorders and their consequences. To read the Report, visit <http://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/>

