

# Facts and Recommendations for Communities

## 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 my community be concerned about substance misuse and substance use disorders?

Alcohol and drug misuse and substance use disorders are pervasive problems that affect many communities.

- Over 66 million people (25% of all people) reported binge drinking.<sup>1</sup> Binge drinking is defined as having 5 or more standard alcoholic drinks for men, and 4 or more standard alcoholic drinks for women, on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 48 million people (18%) said they used an illicit drug or misused prescription drugs in the past year.<sup>1</sup>
- Illicit drug use and its consequences are increasing. More than 47,000 people died from a drug overdose in 2014<sup>2</sup>, and nearly 30,000 of these deaths involved prescription drugs.<sup>3</sup>
- Substance misuse and substance use disorders costs the U.S. and local communities approximately \$442 billion each year.<sup>4,5</sup>

Substance misuse and substance use disorders have direct and indirect consequences for communities.

- Direct consequences of substance misuse and substance use disorders include motor vehicle crashes, injuries, social and legal problems, impaired health, overdose, deaths, and babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome or fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.
- Long-term consequences of alcohol and drug misuse and substance use disorders include higher health care costs, the spread of infectious disease, drug-related crime, interpersonal violence, unintended pregnancy, and stress within families.

<sup>1</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ), 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Rudd et al., 2015.

<sup>3</sup> National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 2015

<sup>4</sup> Sacks et al., 2015.

<sup>5</sup> National Drug Intelligence Center, 2011.



across the U.S. working to reduce substance misuse in their communities.

Source: CADCA, 2016

### How have communities successfully reduced substance misuse and substance use disorders?

#### ✓ Prevention:

- A variety of community-based prevention programs and alcohol policies have been shown to prevent substance initiation, harmful use, and substance-related problems across the lifespan. For example, programs such as *Communities That Care* and *Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol* have successfully reduced alcohol and drug use among adolescents.
- Raising alcohol prices; limiting where, when, and to whom alcohol can be sold; and increased enforcement of existing alcohol-related laws, such as the minimum legal drinking age of 21 and laws to prevent driving under the influence of alcohol, have successfully reduced alcohol misuse and related harms in communities where they have been implemented.



## Treatment:

- Community coalitions, composed of individuals and organizations from multiple sectors of society engaged in substance misuse issues, have been effective in getting people into treatment by conducting outreach to connect them to appropriate resources.
- Many local communities' educational campaigns target the general public to improve understanding about substance use problems, increase knowledge of community health and safety risks, and promote access to available treatment services.



## Recovery:

- Recovery community organizations are often best positioned to promote long-term recovery through programs and services that are grounded in the values and principles of the people they serve.
- Recovery experts have raised awareness about services that address substance use disorders as chronic conditions through recovery management supports and services, often delivered by peers.

## What can my community do?

- 1** *Build awareness of substance use and misuse as a public health problem.* Community groups and coalitions can host community forums, town hall meetings, and listening sessions, and education and awareness days to foster conversations about substance misuse and substance use disorders and provide opportunities to educate the community, funders, and policy makers.
- 2** *Invest in evidence-based prevention interventions and recovery supports.* Effective community-based prevention programs can reduce substance misuse. Research shows that for each dollar invested in evidence-based prevention programs, up to \$10 is saved in treatment for alcohol or other substance misuse-related costs. Recovery high schools and collegiate recovery programs can provide a supportive environment for students in recovery.<sup>6-9</sup>
- 3** *Implement interventions to reduce harms associated with alcohol and drug misuse.* A comprehensive public health approach to addressing substance
- 4** *Mobilize different sectors of the community to encourage change.* Community coalitions and community leaders should work together to mobilize health care organizations, social service organizations, educational systems, community-based organizations, government health agencies, religious institutions, law enforcement, local businesses, researchers, and other public, private, and voluntary entities to work toward reductions in substance misuse and substance use disorders and improve public health.

<sup>6</sup> Hawkins et al., 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Spoth et al., 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Aos et al., 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Pentz, 1998.

## 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/>

