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 have substance misuse and substance use disorders become a public health crisis in the United States?

- Over 66 million people (25% of all people) reported binge drinking. Binge drinking is defined as having 5 or more standard drinks for men, and 4 or more standard drinks for women, on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.¹
- Nearly 48 million people (18% of all people) said they used an illicit drug or misused prescription drugs in the past year.¹
- Illicit drug use and its consequences are increasing. More than 47,000 people died from a drug overdose in 2014,² and nearly 30,000 of these deaths involved prescription drugs.³ Alcohol misuse contributes to 88,000 deaths in the United States each year.⁴
- One in 7 people in the United States is expected to develop a substance use disorder at some point in their lives.¹

How must we change our attitudes about substance misuse to successfully address this crisis?

- Substance use disorders have a neurobiological basis. They should be treated as a medical issue like any other.
- We must change social attitudes, shifting how we think, talk, and act towards people with substance use problems.
- We have a moral obligation and economic imperative to provide access to high quality care for those suffering from substance use disorders.

What can we do to solve this public health crisis?

- This public health crisis requires a public health solution, marshalling all the resources needed to address substance misuse and substance use disorders in our communities.
- Prevention works, treatment is effective, and recovery is possible for everyone.

¹ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ), 2016.
² Rudd et al., 2015.
³ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 2015
⁴ Stahre et al., 2014.
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/