

# Facts and Recommendations for Health Professionals and Health Care Systems

## FACING ADDICTION IN AMERICA

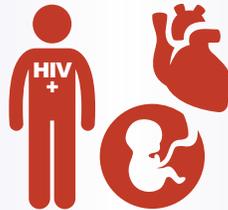
The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health

### 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?

**Substance misuse has serious consequences including:**



- ▶ Heart and liver diseases
- ▶ Various forms of cancer
- ▶ HIV/AIDS
- ▶ Problems related to drinking or using drugs during pregnancy

- The medical consequences of substance misuse are not limited to substance use disorders. *Many other health problems*, such as cardiovascular and cardiopulmonary diseases, liver and pancreatic diseases, stroke, and cancers of the larynx, liver, and colon are associated with alcohol or drug misuse.
- Substance misuse and substance use disorders are estimated to cost the U.S. *\$442 billion each year in health care costs, lost productivity, and criminal justice costs*.<sup>1,2</sup>
- More than 20 million people have a substance use disorder, but *only about 1 in 10 people receive any type of specialty treatment*.<sup>3</sup>
- Studies show that every dollar spent on *substance use disorder treatment saves \$4 in health care costs*.<sup>4</sup>
- Most existing substance use disorder *treatment programs lack the needed training, personnel, and infrastructure* to provide treatment for co-occurring physical and mental illnesses.
- Reducing substance misuse and related disorders calls for a *public health approach*, which includes integration of substance use disorder services with mainstream health care.

<sup>1</sup> Sacks et al., 2015.

<sup>2</sup> National Drug Intelligence Center, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Ettner et al., 2006.

### Why is integration of services for substance use disorders with general health care so important?

#### Increased quality of health care

- Substance use disorders should be treated as chronic medical conditions.
- Substance misuse, mental health disorders, and other general medical conditions, such as diabetes, Hepatitis C, and HIV/AIDS are often interconnected.
- Integration can lead to reduced health disparities and improved health outcomes through better care coordination.
- Delivering substance use disorder services in mainstream health care can be cost-effective and may reduce intake/treatment wait times at treatment facilities.

#### Improved access to care

- Individuals have greater access to coverage for substance use disorders because of the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 and the Affordable Care Act, which require substance use and mental health disorder treatment to be covered at the same levels as other chronic conditions.
- However, affected individuals and their families, as well as many health care professionals, are uncertain about the nature and range of health care benefits and covered services available.

## What is needed to ensure effective integration and reduce substance misuse?

- Effective integration of prevention, treatment, and recovery services across health care systems is key to reducing substance misuse and its consequences.
- One of the first steps is screening for substance misuse and substance use disorders. If screening identifies a problem, early intervention can prevent escalation of misuse to a substance use disorder.
- For individuals with substance use disorders, primary care providers can provide medication-assisted treatment for certain substance use disorders, offer patient education, and refer patients to specialty substance use disorder treatment as appropriate.
- Health care professionals can also link patients to recovery support services and provide long-term monitoring.
- Improving training and supporting infrastructure for physicians, nurses, and other health care professionals to screen, diagnose, and treat substance use disorders, as well as co-occurring physical and mental illnesses, is crucial.

## What else can health care professionals and health care systems do?

### Health Care Professionals and Professional Associations

- 1 **Address substance use-related health issues with the same sensitivity and care as any other chronic health condition.** All health care professionals can play a role in addressing substance misuse and substance use disorders through prevention strategies and health care services.
- 2 **Support high quality care for substance use disorders** by setting workforce guidelines; advocating for curriculum changes in medical, nursing, dental, and other professional schools; and promoting continuing medical education training

### Health Care Systems

- 3 **Promote primary prevention** through safe prescribing of controlled substances, using alternative strategies to manage pain and anxiety, and increasing use of prescription drug monitoring programs.
- 4 **Promote use of evidence-based treatments** across all contexts of care, tailoring plans to individual needs and educating health care professionals on medication-assisted treatment.
- 5 **Promote effective integration of prevention and treatment services** by educating and training the relevant workforces; developing new workflows to support universal screening, appropriate follow-up, coordination of care across providers, and ongoing recovery management;
- 6 **Work with payors to develop and implement comprehensive billing models**, including updating coverage policies to include prevention, screening, brief counseling, and recovery support services.
- 7 **Implement health information technologies to promote efficient and high quality care**, including electronic health records, patient registries, computer-based educational systems, and mobile applications.

## 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/>

