



OVERVIEW: ACCESS TO RECOVERY FROM ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE DISORDERS

Millions of Americans suffer from alcohol and drug use disorders, which include misuse, dependence, or addiction to alcohol and/or legal or illegal drugs. In 2002, an estimated 22 million Americans met the criteria for substance dependence or abuse.¹ Alcohol and drug use disorders also have a significant impact on spouses and others who are close to people with such disorders. Family members may experience increased family conflict; emotional or physical violence; and increased family stress, including work problems, illness, marital strain, and financial problems.²

Many people in need of recovery have difficulty obtaining the treatment that can help them rejoin their families, their jobs, and their lives in their communities. Yet many others have overcome the numerous barriers to recovery, and as a result are leading healthy and productive lives.

The statistics surrounding those who face barriers to being treated for alcohol and drug use disorders are startling. In 2002:

- Only 10.3 percent of Americans age 12 or older who needed treatment for an alcohol or drug use disorder actually received treatment.³
- More than 95 percent of people with an alcohol use disorder who did not receive treatment did not believe treatment was necessary; more than 94 percent of people with untreated drug use disorders held the same belief.⁴
- Of those who recognized that they needed treatment, 35 percent (266,000) of Americans suffering from alcohol use disorder—and an estimated 88,000 people suffering from a drug use disorder (24.4 percent)—tried but were unable to obtain treatment.⁵

Clearly, barriers must be overcome to improve Americans' access to recovery.

What Are the Barriers to Treatment?

Many barriers keep people from the treatment they need, including:

- A system-wide failure to identify affected people and their families and direct them to treatment and recovery resources
- The cost of treatment
- Treatment systems that do not have the facilities or staff to accommodate the needs of some individuals (such as the disabled and those with childcare issues that make it difficult to access treatment)
- Denial and stigma associated with alcohol and drug use disorders.

Even when people recognize that they are having problems with alcohol or drugs, many say they do not seek treatment because they are not prepared to face the challenges of treatment and recovery. Another reason is that they do not believe they can afford to obtain treatment.⁷

Public and private insurers do not cover treatment at the same level as they cover other health programs, leaving states and local governments to shoulder a large share of the costs for treatment programs. As state budgets tighten, the money available to fund treatment programs is shrinking, making it more difficult for Americans to obtain access to local treatment programs.⁸

Sources

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5. *ibid.*
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