

## Advancing Prevention, Treatment & Recovery for Substance Use Disorders

Although first recognized as a disease in 1956 by the American Medical Association, until recently, little progress has been made in understanding and managing addiction as a chronic health condition. Addiction affects millions of individuals and families every year, yet it is often undiagnosed or ignored, resulting in incredible costs to individuals, families and communities. In a recent survey, 63 percent of those polled said addiction had an impact on their lives, and for most the addiction was among a family member. The annual combined cost incurred in health care, lost productivity, and crime related to untreated addiction has been estimated at \$365 billion in the U.S. alone.<sup>i</sup>

Untreated addiction takes a tremendous toll on an individuals' physical health. According to a report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) "it is not possible to deliver safe or adequate healthcare without simultaneous consideration of general health, mental health and substance use issues."<sup>ii</sup> Excessive alcohol use has been linked with a number of health problems, including heart disease and cirrhosis. Substance use and dependence can result in and exacerbate certain medical conditions and complicate medical treatment.<sup>iii</sup> In 2004, adults with a mental health and/or substance use disorder diagnosis accounted for 1 out of 4 stays at U.S. community hospitals and one out of 14 stays included substance-related disorders.<sup>iv</sup> Connections between healthcare, community mental health, and specialty addiction treatment programs need to be strengthened.

Broader implementation of strategies to increase prevention, early intervention, treatment, research and recovery for substance use disorders would have a significant impact on the health of individuals, families and communities nationwide. As a first line of defense, health care providers should be trained to screen for and intervene in the case of SUD's and know how to refer those in need to specialized treatment as they do for other chronic illnesses such as diabetes or hypertension.<sup>v</sup> Research and practice indicate that the majority of people with substance use disorders do recover, and the likelihood of recovery is increased when people are able to access treatment, continuing care and ongoing recovery support;<sup>vi</sup> it is time that public policy and funding support scientific research and best practice. We must implement policies and practices that:

- #1 Prevent and treat SUD's through a broad-based continuum of healthcare that includes community-based prevention, early intervention, specialized treatment and comprehensive recovery services
- #2 Cover treatment and continuing care for SUD's by public and private payers similarly to other chronic illnesses
- #3 Urge significant investment from the public and private sectors to strengthen and expand the specialized addiction treatment workforce and increase training in relevant fields, including medicine, nursing, and social work, to adequately prepare those professionals to identify, diagnose, and recommend appropriate treatment for SUDs
- #4 Assess and refer justice-involved youth and adults for appropriate, coordinated, community-based SUD and mental health treatment services, that are available before, during and post-supervision
- #5 Eliminate discriminatory laws and policies that prevent and deter individuals from accessing resources that are critical to recovery including housing, employment and education

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<sup>i</sup> Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment 35 (2008) 1–12, Longitudinal trends in hospital admissions with co-occurring alcohol/drug diagnoses, 1994–2002, Patricia B. Santora, (Ph.D.)□, Heidi E. Hutton, (Ph.D.)

<sup>ii</sup> Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century, [http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record\\_id=10027](http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10027)

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iii Estimating the Prevalence of Substance Use, Abuse, and Dependence Among Social Security Disability Benefit Recipients Debra Brucker, State of Maine, Office of Substance Abuse, JOURNAL OF DISABILITY POLICY STUDIES VOL. 18/NO. 3/2007

iv Care of Adults With Mental Health and Substance Abuse Disorders in U.S. Community Hospitals, 2004, HCUP Fact Book No. 10. Available online <http://www.ahrq.gov/data/hcup/factbk10/index.html#Contents>

v Managing Addiction as a Chronic Condition, Michael Dennis, Ph.D. and Christy K Scott, Ph.D., Chestnut Health Systems, NIDA Addiction Science & Clinical Practice, Volume 4, Number 1 - December 2007.

vi Id

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