

# General Facts and Recommendations

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



**1 in 7  
people**

will develop  
a substance  
use disorder  
at some  
point in their  
lives.

Source: Kessler et al., 2005.

- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 48 million people (18% of all people) 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> Alcohol misuse contributes to 88,000 deaths in the United States each year.<sup>4</sup>
- One in 7 people in the United States is expected to develop a substance use disorder at some point in their lives.<sup>1</sup> Only 1 in 10 people with a substance use disorder receive any type of substance use treatment.<sup>1</sup>

<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> Stahre et al., 2014.

### 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.



## How can you help reduce substance misuse and substance use disorders?

- **Individuals and families:** Reach out, talk to your children, be supportive of those who have a substance use disorder and those in recovery.
- **Educators and academic institutions:** Teach accurate, up-to-date scientific information and enhance training of health care professionals. Implement evidence-based prevention interventions in schools and universities.
- **Health care professionals and professional associations:** Address substance-related health issues with the same sensitivity and care as any other chronic health condition and support high-quality, integrated care for substance use disorders.
- **Health care systems:** Promote efficiency and high-quality care through primary prevention, evidence-based treatments, and effective integrated and coordinated care. Work with payers to develop and implement comprehensive billing models and leverage health information technologies to improve access to and quality of care.
- **Communities:** Build awareness and invest in evidence-based prevention interventions and recovery supports.
- **Private sector:** industry and commerce: Encourage adults who use legal substances to be responsible and support youth substance use prevention.
- **Federal, state, local, and tribal governments:** Provide leadership, guidance, and vision in supporting an evidence-based approach.
- **Researchers:** Focus on implementable, sustainable solutions; consider how scientific research can inform public policy and programs, and promote rigorous evaluation of policies and programs.

## 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/>