

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



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, over 27 million people in the United States reported current use of illicit drugs or misuse of prescription drugs, and over 66 million people (nearly a quarter of the adult and adolescent population) reported bingeⁱ drinking in the past month.¹ Alcohol and drug misuse and related disorders are major public health challenges that are taking an enormous toll on individuals, families, and society. Neighborhoods and communities as a whole are also suffering as a result of alcohol- and drug-related crime and violence, abuse and neglect of children, and the increased costs of health care associated with substance misuse. It is estimated that the yearly economic impact of substance misuse is \$249 billion for alcohol misuse and \$193 billion for illicit drug use.^{2,3}

Despite the social and economic costs, this is a time of great opportunity. Ongoing health care and criminal justice reform efforts, as well as advances in clinical, research, and information technologies are creating new opportunities for increased access to effective prevention and treatment services. This Report reflects our commitment to leverage these opportunities to drive improvements in individual and public health related to substance misuse, use disorder, and related health consequences.

Most Americans know someone with a substance use disorder, and many know someone who has lost or nearly lost a family member as a consequence of substance misuse. Yet, at the same time, few other medical conditions are surrounded by as much shame and misunderstanding as substance use disorders. Historically, our society has treated addiction and misuse of alcohol and drugs as symptoms of moral weakness or as a willful rejection of societal norms, and these problems have been addressed primarily through the criminal justice system. Our health care system has not given the same level of attention to substance use disorders as it has to other health concerns that affect similar numbers of people. Substance use disorder treatment in the United States remains largely segregated from the rest of health care and serves only a fraction of those in need of treatment. Only about 10 percent of people with a substance use disorder receive any type of specialty treatment.¹ Further, over 40 percent of people with a substance use disorder also have a mental health condition, yet fewer than half (48.0 percent) receive treatment for either disorder.¹

Many factors contribute to this “treatment gap,” including the inability to access or afford care, fear of shame and discrimination, and lack of screening for substance misuse and substance use disorders in general health care settings. Further, about 40 percent of individuals who know they have an alcohol or drug problem are not ready to stop using, and many others simply feel they do not have a problem or a need for treatment¹—which may partly be a consequence of the neurobiological changes that profoundly affect the judgment, motivation, and priorities of a person with a substance use disorder.

To learn more about the [consequences of alcohol and drug misuse](#), review the sidebar.

Review other sections of the Executive Summary:

- [Reasons for Hope and Optimism](#)
- [The Time is Right For a Surgeon General's Report](#)
- [The Surgeon General's Report](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

References

1. Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2016). *Results from the 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed tables*. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

2. Sacks, J. J., Gonzales, K. R., Bouchery, E. E., Tomedi, L. E., & Brewer, R. D. (2015). 2010 national and state costs of excessive alcohol consumption. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 49(5), e73-e79.

3. National Drug Intelligence Center. (2011). *National drug threat assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

Footnotes:

i. Binge drinking for men is drinking 5 or more standard alcoholic drinks, and for women, 4 or more standard alcoholic drinks on the same occasion on at least 1 day in the past 30 days.

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