



Disability Policy Consortium

Call To Action: Urgent Need to Address Substance Abuse Among People with Disabilities in Massachusetts

Did You Know?

Nationally

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that as of 2015, 1.5 million Americans experiencing mental illness in the past year also abused opioids in the past year.
- As of 2012, around 7-8 million individuals with intellectual disabilities also abuse substances.
- According to the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, people with disabilities have overall substance abuse rates that are 2-4 times higher than that of the general population.

In Massachusetts

- According to a survey by the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS), of those seeking treatment from BSAS from 2011-2014, 83% had a prior history of mental health treatment.
- A 2008-2011 survey found that 16% of middle school students with disabilities surveyed reported using marijuana while only 7% of middle school students with no disabilities reported similar use.
- According to the 2016 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 5.7% of people with disabilities stated that they used opioids non-medicinally versus 1.7% of people with no disabilities surveyed.

Factors Making It Harder To Help Individuals With Disabilities Recover From Substance Abuse

- Information on recovery services is not always in accessible formats for people with disabilities.
- Lack of reliable and affordable transportation limits treatment opportunities.
- In Massachusetts, to provide treatment for mental health and substance abuse, facilities need to obtain separate licenses for treating mental health and substance abuse which require different processes, further complicating service delivery to this population.
- If people with disabilities try to go to events and therapy sessions to recover from substance abuse and feel that the staff at these events are insensitive to their needs, this can cause such individuals leave events and thus not receive needed services.

Programs that Help Individuals With Disabilities With Substance Abuse In Massachusetts

- The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) has made interpreters available for monthly 12-step programs statewide and provides training for interpreters regarding substance use disorders. They also offer trainings for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to become recovery coaches. MCDHH also has books, DVDs and films regarding recovery strategies available as part of their resource libraries in Boston, Worcester and Springfield.
- Massachusetts General Hospital's ARMS (Addiction Recovery Management Services) provides treatment and counseling for those aged 14-26 who have a psychiatric diagnosis and abuse substances. Visit: <http://www.massgeneral.org/psychiatry/services/treatmentprograms.aspx?id=1945>.

“Addictive substance abuse is a hot topic in the media and among academic institutions, unless you are investigating abuse by persons with disabilities. Significant research disparities exist when it comes to the study of substance abuse and disability. Too much attention is paid to disability as an outcome or by product of substance abuse, while very few studies address the facilitation, impact and outcome of addictive substance (tobacco, alcohol and drugs) abuse by persons who have disabilities. “ Burton D. Pusch, RhD

- Genesis Club Inc. (a nonprofit that provides support services for people recovering from psychiatric conditions) holds weekly dual recovery meetings on Thursdays at Ad Care hospital in Worcester. Visit: <http://www.genesisclub.org/wellness.html>.
- Level 4 Detoxification Programs: Provide services for people with complex health needs who are seeking treatment for substance use. The Level 4 Detoxification Programs in Massachusetts are:
 - St. Elizabeth's Medical Center (Brighton), <https://www.semc.org/service-directory/substance-abuse>.
 - Brigham & Women's Faulkner Hospital (Boston), 617-983-7060 (option #2).
 - AdCare Hospital (Worcester), (800) 345-3552.
- The Massachusetts Substance Abuse Hotline: Offers free information and referral services to individuals seeking treatment for substance use disorders in general: 1-800-327-5050.
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health sponsors Social Model Homes where priority for such housing is given to people with disabilities residential treatment for over 30 days for people in early recovery. Call the Substance Abuse Hotline (listed above) for more information.
- The US Department of Veteran's Affairs has five medical centers throughout Massachusetts in Boston, Bedford, Brockton, Jamaica Plane, and Leeds) offering substance use services to veterans (with and without disabilities.) Visit: https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/state_SUD.cfm?STATE=MA.

Other States' Programs That Help Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals To Recover From Substance Abuse

Other states have also made efforts to help people with disabilities, especially people who are deaf or hard of hearing, who are recovering from substance abuse. Model programs include:

- Minnesota's Chemical Dependency program offers group therapy and 1-1 counselling in sign language for people who are deaf or hard of hearing and all staff are trained to be sensitive to Deaf culture. For more information visit: <http://www.mncddeaf.org/>. (Open to people outside Minnesota.)
- The Monroe Michigan Harbor Light Substance Abuse Treatment Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing offers outpatient treatment to people facing addiction. All staff are fluent in sign language. Although it's only open to Michigan residents, the program can be a model to help service providers in Massachusetts continue to improve their treatment for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. For more information visit: <http://centralusa.salvationarmy.org/emi/HL-home#3>.

How Advocates Can Help People With Disabilities With Substance Abuse

The Disability Policy Consortium (DPC) recommends that advocates:

- Ensure that people with disabilities are included in future research about illegal substance use.
- Ensure that all online and other written materials about substance use recovery services are in accessible formats for people who are visually impaired.
- Educate people with disabilities about the treatments available to help them become sober.
- Urge the Commonwealth to continue to improve their substance abuse services for people with disabilities by continuing to emulate the model programs from other states described above.
- Urge the Massachusetts Department of Public Health to gather further data to better assess the needs of people with disabilities who also face substance use disorders.
- Encourage the state and other interested parties increase funding for and improve coordination of services in programs targeting individuals with disabilities who also face substance use disorders.
- Ensure that substance abuse recovery meetings are held in accessible locations.

For a list of reference used for this issue brief contact Maggie Sheets at msheets@dpcma.org.

The DPC is a statewide cross-disability civil rights organization. Visit us online: www.dpcma.org.



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