



Addiction and Mental Illness Are Chronic Diseases That Are Effectively Treated

Addiction

- Scientific evidence has shown addiction to be a chronic, relapse-prone disease which literally changes brain chemistry. Addiction is recognized as a disease by the American Medical Association.
- Addiction is an equal-opportunity disease. Prevalent and costly, it disrupts the well-being and health care of individuals in every age, income and ethnic group. Yet, only a small percentage of persons with alcohol and drug addiction get treatment, unlike those living with other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension or asthma.
- For the past 30 years, federally sponsored research has repeatedly confirmed the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of treatment to counteract the powerful effects of addiction and help patients regain control of their lives. For example, a recent study demonstrated a reduction in alcohol and drug use (52 percent and 69 percent, respectively) one year after treatment.¹
- Millions of people with addictions have been successfully treated. Strong motivation can facilitate the treatment process. Sanctions or enticements in the family, employment setting or criminal justice system can increase both treatment entry and retention rates and the success of drug treatment interventions.²



Mental Illness

- Mental illnesses are serious medical illnesses. They cannot be overcome through “will power” and are not related to a person’s “character” or intelligence. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that one in four adults—approximately 57.7 million Americans—experience a mental health disorder in a given year.³
- The best treatments for serious mental illnesses today are highly effective; between 70 and 90 percent of individuals have significant reduction of symptoms and improved quality of life with a combination of pharmacological and psychosocial treatments and supports.⁴

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- Depression tends to affect people in their prime working years and may last a lifetime if untreated. More than 80 percent of people with clinical depression can be successfully treated. With early recognition, intervention, and support, most employees can overcome clinical depression and pick up where they left off.⁵
- Without treatment the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering: unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives.⁶
- **The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than \$100 billion each year in the United States.**⁷
- With appropriate effective medication and a wide range of services tailored to their needs, most people who live with serious mental illnesses can significantly reduce the impact of their illness and find a satisfying measure of achievement and independence. A key concept is to develop expertise in developing strategies to manage the illness process.⁸
- Early identification and treatment is of vital importance. By ensuring access to the treatment and recovery supports that have both proven effective, recovery is accelerated and the further harm related to the course of illness is minimized.⁹
- Chronic drug abusers who also live with mental illness can be treated. Researchers currently are investigating the most effective way to treat drug abusers with mental illness, and especially whether or not treating both conditions simultaneously leads to better recovery. Currently, the two conditions often are treated separately or without regard to each other. As a result, many individuals with co-occurring disorders are sent back and forth between substance abuse and mental health treatment settings.¹⁰

¹ Open Society Institute-Baltimore. Tackling Drug Addiction. Found at: www.soros.org/initiatives/baltimore/focus_areas/drug_addiction

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research Based Guide. Found at: <http://www.nida.nih.gov/PDF/PODAT/PODAT.pdf>

³ National Alliance on Mental Illness. Found at: www.nami.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Inform_Yourself/About_Mental_Illness/About_Mental_Illness.htm

⁴ National Alliance on Mental Illness.

⁵ Mental Health America. Factsheet: Depression in the Workplace. Found at: <http://www.nmha.org/index.cfm?objectid=C7DF951E-1372-4D20-C88B7DC5A2AE586D>

⁶ Mental Health America.

⁷ National Alliance on Mental Illness.

⁸ National Alliance on Mental Illness.

⁹ National Alliance on Mental Illness.

¹⁰ National Drug Intelligence Center, a component of the U.S. Department of Justice. Drug Abuse and Mental Illness Fast Facts. Found at: <http://www.usdoj.gov/ndic/pubs7/7343/7343p.pdf>