



COMMUNITY ADVOCATES

NEWS RELEASE

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STUDY SHOWS WISCONSIN SUFFERS FROM HIGH RATE OF ALCOHOL ABUSE, UNMET TREATMENT NEED

Wisconsin's Treatment Facilities Decreased from 324 in 2002 to 290 in 2006

Milwaukee (March 9, 2009)—Despite some of the highest alcohol consumption rates in the nation, Wisconsin does not offer sufficient treatment options for people suffering from alcohol abuse, according to a recent report by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Based on national survey data, SAMHSA's "State Estimates of Substance Use from the 2005-2006 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health" found that Wisconsin has some of the highest rates in the nation of alcohol use and binge alcohol use. In Wisconsin in 2005-06:

- 22.5 percent of individuals age 18-25 suffered from alcohol dependence or abuse, compared to 17.5 percent nationally—the fourth consecutive year Wisconsin's results were higher than the national average.
- 21 percent of individuals age 18-25 needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol use, compared to 17 percent nationally—the fourth consecutive year Wisconsin's results were higher than the national average.
- 63.1 percent of individuals age 12 or older had used alcohol in the past month, the highest rate in the nation.

Wisconsin was also among the top 10 states with the least perception of harm associated with having five or more alcoholic drinks once or twice a week.

Rates of past year drug dependence or abuse in Wisconsin, however, have generally been below the national rates. In 2005-06, slightly fewer than 2.5 percent of Wisconsin residents suffered from illicit drug abuse, compared with 2.8 percent nationally.

"This dangerous combination of drug and alcohol abuse with inaccessible treatment takes a serious toll on public safety and public health in Wisconsin, putting us all at risk and costing the state dearly," said Clarence Johnson, Justice 2000 executive director and a partner of the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI).

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Johnson continued: “We must work diligently at not only ramping down the permissive culture of binge drinking in Wisconsin but also closing the gap that keeps treatment out of the reach of too many of our neighbors in need.”

Untreated addiction has severe consequences. According to a joint statement of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, each year in Wisconsin drug and alcohol use is responsible for more than 90,000 arrests, 2,100 deaths and \$4.6 billion in associated costs.

The Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative is a collaboration of law enforcement agencies, public health organizations, treatment providers and advocates that works to expand access to high-quality drug and alcohol treatment for individuals who need it.

Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap

In 2007, 23.2 million Americans needed addiction treatment but only 10 percent were able to receive it. The most recent SAMHSA analysis found that in 2004, 66,240 Milwaukee County residents age 12 years and older needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol addiction; and an additional 16,020 residents needed but did not receive treatment for drug addiction. Many factors figure into this “treatment gap,” including:

- **Lack of facilities.** According to a survey by the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services, the number of treatment facilities in Wisconsin has decreased from 324 in 2002 to 290 in 2006. In the latest survey, Wisconsin had 134 private non-profit facilities, 102 private for-profit facilities and 13 facilities owned or operated by Tribal authorities.
- **Lack of adequate health care.** In Wisconsin, nearly 500,000 people do not have insurance—roughly 8 percent of the population.
- **Discrimination by insurers against people suffering from addiction.** Many health insurance companies restrict the amount of drug and alcohol treatment a patient can receive, limiting visits to treatment facilities and charging higher-than-normal co-pays, deductibles and co-insurance.

“The system is broken: with the high number of uninsured in our state and the restrictions insurers place on paying for treatment, it’s no wonder that access to treatment is so hard to come by in Wisconsin,” said David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute and MATI program director. “Common sense dictates that this treatment gap is only going to widen: increased economic recession will lead to more unemployment and more uninsured. Sadly, we can’t expect any accompanying decrease in chronic alcohol abuse.”

SAMHSA’s “State Estimates of Substance Use from the 2005-2006 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health” can be found at <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k6state/2k6state.pdf>

Wisconsin-specific information from the report can be found at http://www.samhsa.gov/StatesInBrief/2009/WISCONSIN_508.pdf