



**News Release**

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## **ADVOCATES, TREATMENT PROVIDERS RENEW CALL FOR INCREASED ADDICTION TREATMENT FUNDING, ACCESS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY**

### **ADVOCATES CELEBRATE TRIUMPH OVER ADDICTION DURING RECOVERY MONTH**

Milwaukee (Aug. 26, 2009)—More than 82,000 Milwaukee County residents need treatment for an addiction to drugs or alcohol but do not receive it, according to the most recent study of the “treatment gap” by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. That’s enough men and women to fill every seat at Lambeau Field, with nearly 11,000 people left over.

Nationally, only 10 percent of the more than 23 million people who need addiction treatment actually receive it.

This September, Milwaukee-area advocates and treatment providers are raising awareness of the treatment gap and its many consequences. September is National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month, the observance of the struggles and triumphs of men and women in recovery from addiction as well as the effectiveness of treatment.

The consequences of the treatment gap are profound:

- Each year in Wisconsin, more than 2,160 deaths and 8,500 traffic crashes are attributed to alcohol and other drug use and addiction, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.

- Annual economic costs associated with drug and alcohol use in Wisconsin total \$4.6 billion.

- Nationally, untreated drug and alcohol abuse costs \$500 billion a year in health care expenditures, lost productivity and related crime, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse; and contributes to the death of more than 100,000 Americans a year.

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## Addiction Recovery Month / Add One

“Recovery from addiction takes many forms, but the ability to access appropriate treatment the moment you need it—similar to receiving treatment for any other disease—is the most crucial component,” said Mark Fossie, president and CEO of M&S Clinical Services, Inc., which provides addiction treatment to low-income men and women. “As it is, if you’re poor in Milwaukee County you have little chance at getting appropriate and unlimited treatment on demand, and if you’re middle class in Milwaukee County your outlook is hardly any better.”

“It is scientifically proven that treatment is an effective way to help people recover from addiction, regain control of their lives and become contributing members of society,” said Dr. Francine Feinberg, executive director of Meta House, a treatment center for women and their children. “Our inability and unwillingness to provide treatment to all who need it is shameful and hurts us all, costing us lives, money and resources.”

Fossie and Feinberg are members of the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative, a coalition of more than 80 treatment providers, recovery advocates, faith-based organizations, and public health and law enforcement officials seeking to close the addiction treatment gap.

According to David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute and MATI program director, our inability to provide sufficient addiction treatment represents a failure of the public health system.

“The ripple effects of untreated addiction reach all of us in the form of increased medical costs, wasted tax dollars and higher crime,” said Riemer. “Untreated addiction destroys families, makes our roads less safe and leads to overcrowded jails. We’re well past the point where addiction treatment must be a right for all, and not a privilege for a few.”

### **Lack of Insurance, Insufficient Public Funding Lead to Gap**

The causes of this treatment gap include:

- **Lack of insurance.** More than 500,000 are uninsured in Wisconsin—roughly 8 percent of the population—and more than 45 million are uninsured nationally.

- **Insurance that doesn’t provide full treatment benefits.** Insurers routinely fail to provide coverage for addiction treatment and recovery support at the same level as other chronic illnesses by limiting the number of available inpatient and outpatient services, and imposing higher-than-normal limits on cost-sharing, deductibles and out-of-pocket costs.

- **Insufficient public funding.** Until health insurance reform reduces the need for special category funding, the expansion of public appropriations to pay for treatment is necessary at all levels.

## Addiction Recovery Month / Add Two

“The first step to ensuring that everyone who needs addiction treatment actually receives it is to extend health insurance to cover all those who are uninsured,” said Riemer. “The second step is to force insurance companies to pay for addiction treatment to the fullest levels. And the third step is to reform the system that delivers treatment so that everyone can be treated when and where it is most appropriate for them.”

“The treatment gap is a result of misplaced priorities. We still have insurance companies that will limit you to 1,500 substance abuse and mental health dollars, whereas people who suffer from physical illnesses, like diabetes, have all the treatment they need,” said Fossie. “Imagine if we were talking about cancer: would the public stand for telling cancer patients that they could only have a few days of treatment before sending them home? What is the difference?”

Much of this discrepancy in care stems from public policies that discriminate against people suffering from addiction. Stigmas and the long misunderstood disease of addiction have led to strong negative attitudes and stereotypes. These attitudes, in turn, have informed laws and practices that undermine acceptance of addiction as a treatable disease and health condition, and have resulted in barriers to treatment and long-term recovery.

Public education and awareness campaigns have slowly increased positive public attitudes toward addiction, and decades of federally sponsored scientific research showing how chronic abuse literally changes brain chemistry has shed light on the disease-nature of addiction and the realities of relapse.

According to Todd Campbell, director of Marquette University’s 7Cs Counseling Clinics and a MATI coalition member, people in recovery from addiction face day-to-day struggles to fight cravings for drugs and alcohol that can be as strong as cravings for food and water.

“Most people don’t understand that addiction is a lifetime issue—we’ve come to learn that addiction is a relapsing, remitting disease and we know that people with addictions are going to struggle,” said Campbell, himself in recovery. “Though we have more resources and knowledge now at our disposal, there remains this pervasive attitude to ostracize people, that a kid using drugs is ‘trouble’ instead of suffering from a disease. We have to look at addiction as a health issue—that those suffering from addiction need help.”

The Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative is a project of Community Advocates, Inc. and is sponsored by a grant from the Open Society Institute, Baltimore, with additional funding from the Helen Bader Foundation, the Zilber Family Foundation and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.



# The Drug and Alcohol Addiction Treatment Gap By the Numbers

- **82,000**—The number of Milwaukee County residents who need treatment for an addiction to drugs or alcohol but do not receive it, according to the most recent data (2004). This is enough men and women to fill every seat at Lambeau Field, with nearly 11,000 people left over.
- **23.2 million**—The number of people nationally who needed addiction treatment in 2007, the last year for which we have data, according to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- **90**—The percentage of those 23.2 million people who didn't receive treatment.
- **21**—The percentage of Wisconsin residents age 18-25 in 2005-06 who needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol use, compared to 17 percent nationally, according to a recent SAMHSA report. This was the fourth consecutive year Wisconsin's results were higher than the national average.
- **2,160**—The number of deaths per year in Wisconsin for which drug and alcohol use are responsible, according to a joint statement of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
- **\$4.6 billion**—The amount in associated costs per year in Wisconsin for which drug and alcohol use are responsible, according to that same joint statement.
- **1.7 million**—The number of costly emergency department visits per year associated with drug misuse or abuse, according to a 2006 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Drug Abuse Warning Network.
- **76**—The percentage of Americans who know someone personally who has been addicted to alcohol or drugs, according to a recent national poll released jointly by MATI and the Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap initiative. Personal experience with addiction spans all demographic groups
- **73**—The percentage of Americans who support including alcohol and drug addiction treatment as part of national health care reform to make it more accessible and affordable, according to that same poll.
- **500,000**—The number of uninsured people in Wisconsin, roughly 8 percent of the population.