



News Release

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NEW POLL FINDS AMERICANS CONCERNED ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUG ADDICTION, ACCESS TO TREATMENT

Three-Quarters Want Addiction Treatment to Be Part of Health Insurance Reform

Milwaukee (June 18, 2009)—Americans are deeply concerned that there is not enough access to affordable addiction treatment and want national insurance reform to solve that problem, according to a new national poll released jointly by the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI) and the Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap initiative. Additionally, a majority of Americans are personally familiar with addiction, with 76 percent reporting they know someone who has been addicted to alcohol or drugs.

MATI, which last year received a grant from the Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap initiative, is a collaboration among more than 80 state and local organizations—including law enforcement, public health organizations, treatment providers and advocates—to expand access to drug and alcohol treatment in Milwaukee County for everyone who needs it.

Among the key findings, conducted by Lake Research Partners:

- Three-quarters of Americans (76%) and 74% of respondents in the North Central region know someone personally who has been addicted to alcohol or drugs. Personal experience with addiction spans all demographic groups.
- Half of Americans (49%) and 46% of people in the North Central region do not think they would be able to afford the costs of treatment if they or a family member needed it. This concern about affordability is highest among Americans with incomes under \$50,000 (67% say they would not be able to afford treatment).
- Three-quarters (75%) of Americans and 76% of respondents in the North Central region are concerned that people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs many not be able to get treatment because they lack insurance coverage or cannot afford it.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) support including alcohol and drug addiction treatment as part of national health care reform to make it more accessible and affordable. This support cuts across all demographic groups, including 76% of people in the North Central region.

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Polling / Add One

- Two-thirds of Americans (68%), including 66% of people in the North Central region, also support increasing federal and state funding for alcohol and drug prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

“Like most Americans, residents of Wisconsin are concerned that treatment for alcohol and drug addiction may not be available to those who need it because too many people lack adequate insurance coverage or can’t afford treatment,” said David Riemer, Community Advocates Director of Policy and Planning and MATI Program Director. “In these uncertain economic times, the cost of treatment is a critical obstacle for too many. That is why we are working to enact comprehensive health care reform to ensure coverage for everyone who needs it—coverage that includes full addiction and mental health treatment benefits.”

Nationally, Only One in 10 Who Needs Addiction Treatment Receives It

Wisconsin suffers from a substantial treatment gap. A recent survey by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration showed that in Wisconsin in 2005-06, 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. Additionally, 6.29 percent of individuals age 18-25 needed but did not receive treatment for illicit drug use, compared to 7.49 percent nationally.

In 2007, 23.2 million Americans needed treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, but only 10 percent were able to get treatment for this chronic health condition. The vast majority of those who need help are unable to get addiction treatment, either due to lack of health insurance, inadequate insurance coverage or a lack of treatment services in communities.

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.

MATI promotes sweeping change in policy, financing and delivery in order to make addiction treatment available on a parity basis for all those seeking treatment. Community Advocates, Inc. serves as the lead agency for the initiative on behalf of MATI partners: the Benedict Center, City of Milwaukee Health Department, Justice 2000, La Causa, M&S Clinical Services, MICAH, Milwaukee County Department of Health and Social Services, Milwaukee County District Attorney, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.

“While we are working hard to develop local solutions to the treatment gap, it is clear that Americans support the inclusion of addiction treatment in national health care reform,” said Riemer. “There is a growing mandate to reform the nation’s health care system. This research makes clear that Americans—across all demographic groups—want to see addiction treatment included.”

The telephone survey was conducted May 29-June 1, 2009 among a nationally representative sample of 1,001 adults 18 and older. The margin of sampling error is ± 3.1 percentage points. The complete results are available at www.treatmentgap.org.

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Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap (CATG) is a national program of the Open Society Institute. This initiative is designed to create an awareness of—and increase resources to close—an alarming treatment gap: currently, four out of five Americans who need drug and alcohol addiction treatment are unable to get it. The initiative aims to mobilize public support for expanded treatment by increasing public funding, broadening insurance coverage, and achieving greater program efficiency.

The Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative 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.