

# Economic Consequences of Substance Use



In 2017, over 140 million Americans reported current alcohol use and 30.5 million reported using illicit drugs or misuse of prescription drugs in the past 30 days (i.e., current use). Alcohol and drug misuse related disorders are major public health challenges that are taking an enormous toll on individuals, families, and society. Alcohol misuse, illicit drug use, misuse of medications, and substance use disorders are estimated to cost the United States more than \$400 billion in lost workplace productivity (in part, due to premature mortality), health care expenses, law enforcement and other criminal justice costs (e.g., drug-related crimes), and losses from motor vehicle crashes.

- The estimated yearly economic impact of substance misuse is \$249 billion for alcohol misuse and \$193 billion for illicit drug use.
- Every dollar spent on substance use disorder treatment saves \$4 in health care costs and \$7 in criminal justice costs.

## Impact on Workforce

More than 10 million full-time workers in the United States have a substance use disorder—a leading cause of disability—and studies have demonstrated that prevention and treatment programs for employees with substance use disorders are cost effective in improving worker productivity. Substance use disorder treatment is designed to help individuals stop or reduce harmful substance misuse, improve their health and social function, and manage their risk for relapse. Research shows that substance use disorder treatment has a positive economic impact and also improves individuals' productivity, health, and overall quality of life.

## Health Care Integration

Substance use disorder treatment in the United States remains largely segregated from the rest of health care and serves only a fraction of those in need of treatment. Substance use disorders are medical conditions and their treatment impacts and is impacted by other mental and physical health conditions.

- Only about 10% of people with a substance use disorder receive any type of specialty treatment.
- Over 40% of people with a substance use disorder also have a mental health condition, yet fewer than half (48%) receive treatment for either disorder.
- On average individuals with chronic medical conditions incur health care costs two to three times higher when they have a comorbid substance use disorder compared to individuals without this comorbidity.



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A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Supported scientific evidence indicates that closer integration of substance use-related services in mainstream health care systems will have value to both systems. Integration can help address health disparities, reduce health care costs for both patients and family members, and improve general health outcomes.

### **Criminal Justice System**

Historically, our society has treated addiction and misuse of alcohol and drugs as symptoms of moral weakness or as a willful rejection of societal norms, and these problems have been addressed primarily through the criminal justice system. In a 2011 report from the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), it was estimated that the cost to society of drug abuse was \$193 billion, a substantial portion of which—\$113 billion—is associated with drug-related crime, including criminal justice system costs and costs borne by victims of crime. The cost of treating drug abuse (including health costs, hospitalizations, and government specialty treatment) was estimated to be \$14.6 billion, a fraction of these overall societal costs. Prevention and treatment reduce criminal justice-related costs, and they are much less expensive than alternatives such as incarceration. Implementation of evidence-based interventions (EBI's) can have a benefit of more than \$58 for every dollar spent; and studies show that every dollar spent on substance use disorder treatment saves \$4 in health care costs and \$7 in criminal justice costs.

### **Cost Incurred from DUI's**

In 2014, 9,967 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes while driving under the influence of alcohol, representing nearly one third (31%) of all traffic-related fatalities in the United States. DUI continues to be among the most frequent causes for arrests every year. At approximately 1.3 million per year, these arrests represent only about one percent of the actual alcohol-impaired driving incidents reported in national surveys. This suggests that there are many more people who drive while impaired that have not been arrested, putting themselves and others at high risk of being harmed. In addition to the deaths that result from DUI, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that DUI costs the United States more than \$44 billion each year in prosecution, higher insurance rates, higher taxes, medical claims, and property damage. Furthermore, about three quarters of the costs associated with alcohol use were due to binge drinking, and about 40 percent of those costs were paid by government, emphasizing the huge cost of alcohol misuse to taxpayers.

## **Connecticut Resources**

**Department of Mental  
Health and Addiction  
Services**  
[www.ct.gov/dmhas](http://www.ct.gov/dmhas)

## **National Resources**

**Substance Abuse and  
Mental Health Services  
Administration**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)  
**1.800.662.HELP (4357)**

**National Institute on  
Drug Abuse**  
[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)



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