

# PREVENTION OF ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE U.S.

Alcohol abuse is a widespread issue in the United States. Even though it's legal for individuals over age 21 to purchase and drink alcohol, many consume alcohol at levels that pose safety and health risks for themselves and others. Excessive alcohol use can cause serious problems and, for some, may lead to dependence. Alcohol abuse can affect people of all ages, and problems associated with alcohol dependence take a toll on the individual who drinks, as well as their families, children, workplace, and communities.

LEARN MORE TO BE THE ONE WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

## What Communities Can Do



### Family Members and Friends

Family and friends can help to prevent alcohol abuse by knowing and recognizing the warning signs. Signs to look for include:<sup>1</sup>

- Repeated alcohol use resulting in neglect of responsibilities at home, work, or school;
- Using alcohol in situations where it's physically dangerous;
- Experiencing repeated legal problems on account of drinking;
- Continuing to drink even though alcohol is causing social or interpersonal problems; and
- Drinking as a way to relax or de-stress.



### Health Care Providers<sup>2</sup>

- Screen your patients for alcohol use and conduct a brief intervention, if necessary. A guide from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), called **Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician's Guide**, explains two effective methods of screening: a single question asked during the patient's visit, and a written self-report tool that requires less than five minutes to fill out. The guide is available at <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Practitioner/CliniciansGuide2005/guide.pdf>.
- Conduct follow-ups with patients about their alcohol use.



### Educators

Create a positive learning environment and inform college students about the risks of alcohol abuse. Educators and school administrators can influence young people to change their attitudes about alcohol abuse and binge drinking.<sup>3</sup>



### Community Leaders and Organizations

- Communities can implement prevention strategies that focus on changing the environmental conditions that foster problematic alcohol use. These strategies include policies that control access and availability, media messages, and enforcement actions.<sup>4</sup>
- Community members can work with leaders in the community to increase public awareness of the health risks associated with alcohol abuse.<sup>5</sup>
- Learn more about national efforts in the **National Prevention Strategy**, available at <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/initiatives/prevention/strategy/report.pdf>.



## Workplaces<sup>6</sup>

Workplace programs can help employers create cost-effective, safe, and healthy workplaces. Workplace programs that focus on preventing alcohol and drug problems generally have at least five key components:<sup>7</sup>

- A written policy;
- Employee education;
- Supervisor training;
- An employee assistance program (EAP); and
- Drug testing.

Before considering these five components, employers should examine the needs of their organizations and take steps to ensure that the programs they design will work well in their workplaces. Download SAMHSA's **Drug-Free Workplace Kit** from <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Making-Your-Workplace-Drug-Free/SMA07-4230> for more information about implementing programs to prevent problem alcohol use and drug use among employees.



## Everyone

- Join a community coalition or volunteer with a local organization that's working to prevent alcohol abuse and underage drinking.
- Become media-literate to learn that not all media messages (e.g., television ads, portrayals of alcohol use on TV and in the movies) are what they seem. Call attention to depictions of alcohol use that can be misleading because of the presenter's point of view.<sup>8</sup>
- Support and encourage others to get professional help if they have alcohol problems. To find a substance abuse treatment program, go to <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> or call 1-800-662-HELP (4537) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD).

## Helpful Resources

- **The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**, at <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>, provides leadership in the national effort to reduce alcohol-related problems.
- **The Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Center for Excellence**, at <http://www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov>, is a SAMHSA-led initiative devoted to preventing and treating Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). It provides information and resources about FASD and materials to help raise awareness.
- **The Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies**, at <http://captus.samhsa.gov>, is a SAMHSA initiative that works to develop and improve the skills, knowledge, and expertise of the prevention workforce.
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** provides support for people with alcohol problems. More information and a list of support groups are available at <http://www.aa.org>.
- **Al-Anon/Alateen Family Groups**, at <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org>, is a support group for families and friends of people with alcohol problems.
- **The National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcohol Prevention Task Force on College Drinking**, at <http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov> or by calling 301-443-3860, is a site that offers research and information on college drinking.

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be abusing alcohol, help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year through SAMHSA's National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357), or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD). The Helpline provides free and confidential information and treatment referrals in English and Spanish.

## Sources

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- <sup>2</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2005). *Helping Patients Who Drink Too Much: A Clinician's Guide*. Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/Practitioner/CliniciansGuide2005/guide.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (n.d.). *Too Smart to Start: Families, Educators, and Community Leaders*. Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://www.toosmarttostart.samhsa.gov/educators/default.aspx>.
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- <sup>5</sup> Toomey, T.L. and Lenk, K.M. (n.d.). A review of environmental-based community interventions. *Alcohol Research & Health*. The Journal of the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Volume 34, Issue Number 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2007). *Making Your Workplace Drug-Free – A Kit for Employers*. Retrieved December 10, 2014 from <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Making-Your-Workplace-Drug-Free/SMA07-4230>.
- <sup>7</sup> Bush, D.M. & Autry III, J.H. (2002). Substance abuse in the workplace: Epidemiology, effects, and industry. *Occupational Medicine: State of the Art Reviews*, 17:13–25.
- <sup>8</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2009). Underage drinking and media literacy. *SAMHSA News*, Vol. 17 No. 2: March/April 2009. Rockville, MD: SAMHSA. Retrieved December 10, 2014 from [http://media.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsletter/Volume\\_17\\_Number\\_2/MarchApril2009.pdf](http://media.samhsa.gov/samhsaNewsletter/Volume_17_Number_2/MarchApril2009.pdf).