



A Program of Wheeler Clinic

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www.ctclearinghouse.org



## Overcoming Substance Use and Mental Disorders: A Guide to Recovery from Co-occurring Disorders

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

### *What are co-occurring disorders?*

About 10 million Americans have co-occurring disorders, which are a combination of substance use disorders and mental disorders. Substance use disorders include misuse, dependence or addiction to alcohol and/or legal or illegal drugs. Mental disorders refer to any medically diagnosable mental or emotional disorder, including such problems as eating, anxiety, mood and depressive disorders, bipolar illness and schizophrenia.

Co-occurring disorders vary by severity, duration, symptoms, degree of impairment and type of treatment needed. However, they can cause problems in many aspects of people's lives. Their mental and physical health, relationships with others, job performance and the ability to manage day-to-day activities all may be affected.

Above all, it is important to remember that individuals with co-occurring disorders are people. They could be you, your loved one, a neighbor, a teen, an adult – people from all walks of life – with families, hope and dreams like everyone else.

### *How do I know if co-occurring disorders are the problem?*

About half of all Americans who have a problem with alcohol or drugs also have a mental disorder. People with mental disorders are more likely to have a substance use disorder than people who do not have a mental disorder. The symptoms of both are similar, so often only one is diagnosed.

For example, a person may use alcohol or drugs to stop feeling depressed or anxious. People may try to downplay the problem of either a substance use or mental disorder. If one of the

disorders goes untreated, both usually get worse, which can lead to a higher risk for illnesses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, and heart and lung diseases. Other tragedies also may occur, such as unemployment, homelessness, involvement in crime, separation from family and community, and suicide.

Many individuals are uncomfortable seeking help because they are worried about what people may think or say. Others fear discrimination. Getting properly screened and assessed is the first step to getting accurately diagnosed and receiving effective treatment. So if you or someone you know has symptoms of co-occurring disorders, it is very important to seek the help of a qualified professional.

### *Where do I go for the right help?*

In the past, substance use disorders and mental disorders were treated separately. But the best way to treat co-occurring disorders is through an integrated program where addiction treatment and mental health services work together. America's health care system is changing; these types of programs are becoming more available. They provide supportive, culturally sensitive environments for recovery. Many also offer specific services for those at higher risk, such as teens and older adults.

Finding effective treatment for co-occurring disorders is challenging, but help is available. Being well-informed will guide you to achieving recovery and a life of health and well-being.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration  
1-800-662-HELP (Toll-Free)  
800-487-4889 (TDD) (Toll-Free)  
877-767-8432 (Spanish) (Toll-Free)  
<http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov>