

Help, Hope for Those Affected By Alcoholism



Read article written by Sharon Burden, Executive director of NCADD Affiliate Alcohol & Addictions Resource Center, published by the South Bend Tribune

April is Alcohol Awareness Month. Founded and sponsored by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Inc., of which the Alcohol & Addictions Resource Center is an affiliate, this year the theme is "Help for Today, Hope for Tomorrow."

This is the 27th year the organizations have worked together to increase awareness in communities across the United States.

It is estimated that more than a third of U.S. adults who were dependent on alcohol are now in recovery from alcoholism. You may not see them or know them, but they are contributing to our businesses, connecting with their families, and giving back to the community. They have struggled with their own personal nightmares and have set their feet solidly on a path toward hope. Yet, for others to join them and be a part of building a stronger, healthier community, we need to take action -- now. By working together, we can make a difference in the life of someone in need and help fulfill the promise of a more hopeful tomorrow for generations to come.

Alcoholism does not discriminate -- it affects people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, geographic regions and socioeconomic levels. And too many people are still unaware that alcoholism is a disease that can be treated, just like we treat other health disorders such as diabetes and hypertension.

Having worked in the recovery field for almost 30 years, I have seen firsthand the benefits of recovery. Individuals who embrace recovery achieve improved mental and physical health, as well as stronger relationships and a sense of self-worth.

"Alcohol is a drug -- a powerful, mood-altering drug -- and alcoholism is a chronic disease, from which people can and do recover," says Dr. David E. Lewis, chairperson of the Medical-Scientific Committee of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence. "Over the past two

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decades, scientific research has revolutionized our understanding of how alcohol and drugs affect the body and the brain. We now know that prolonged, repeated alcohol and drug use can result in fundamental long-lasting changes in the body including brain structure and functioning."

Alcoholism and alcohol-related problems touch all Americans, directly or indirectly, as our nation's No. 1 public health problem. Currently, nearly 14 million Americans -- one in every 13 adults -- abuse alcohol or are alcoholic. Several million more adults engage in risky drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems. In addition, about 53 percent of men and women in the United States report that one or more of their close relatives have a drinking problem. And, in purely economic terms, alcohol use problems cost society more than \$224 billion per year due to lost productivity, health care costs, business and criminal justice costs (the equivalent of \$746 for every man, woman and child in the United States).

"The good news is that we are making progress," says Robert J. Lindsey, president/CEO of NCADD. "It is now estimated that more than 20 million individuals and family members are living lives in recovery. These individuals have achieved healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities.

"As a society, we've got to do a far better job of increasing awareness and understanding among the public and educate our young people that underage alcohol use is extremely risky behavior," says Lindsey, "that they may be endangering not only their own lives, but the lives of friends, neighbors and loved ones.

"The bottom line," he adds, "is that we all have an investment in reducing the devastating impact that alcohol has on us as individuals, family members and members of our communities. We need to educate ourselves -- as parents, teachers, clergy, employers, counselors, friends and neighbors -- about the devastating power of alcoholism and the healing power of recovery."

To this end, every April, people across America celebrate Alcohol Awareness Month. During the month, we recognize the damaging effects of alcohol and alcoholism and renew our support for individuals battling to overcome addictions. "Help for Today, Hope for Tomorrow" urges all Americans to promote treatment and recovery options and to support all those whose lives have been affected.



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