

CHAPTER 26

SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

BOARD OF HEALTH ROLE AT A GLANCE

- Refer individuals in need of treatment services to local programs.
- Promote the prevention of substance abuse and related illnesses.

OVERVIEW

In our nation there are more deaths, illnesses and disabilities from alcohol, tobacco and other drug and substance abuse than from any other preventable health condition. Of the two million U.S. deaths each year, more than one in four is attributed to alcohol, illicit drug, or tobacco use.

The total economic burden of substance abuse on the U.S. economy each year is staggering. Cost estimates are in excess of 200 billion dollars a year (Robert Wood Johnson, Princeton, New Jersey, 1993).

Although specific cost estimates vary among studies because of differences in underlying assumptions and definitions, all show substantial economic costs. This is an enormous burden that affects our society, because the costs include the expenses of treating substance abuse and its related illnesses, employee productivity losses, costs related to crime, destruction of property and violence associated with illicit drug sales.

Consequences of use:

- Each year, nearly half a million Americans die from alcohol and other drugs.
- AIDS among injection drug users is the fastest growing cause of death among substance abusers.
- At least half of all people arrested for major crimes including homicide, theft, and assault were using illicit drugs at the time of their arrest.
- Between 25% and 40% of all general hospital patients are admitted because of complications related to alcoholism.
- One out of 4 Americans experiences family problems related to alcohol abuse.

No population group is immune to substance abuse and its effects. Men and women and people of all ages, racial and ethnic groups and levels of education smoke, drink, and use illicit drugs. In 1991, some 103 million Americans surveyed had used alcohol in the past month, 46 million had smoked, and almost 13 million had used illicit drugs. (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Princeton, New Jersey, 1993). Each day, 800,000 people receive services in alcohol and other drug treatment programs. During fiscal year 1996 in Massachusetts, there were 101,000 admissions to the publicly funded treatment system. Nevertheless, it is estimated that

only about one in four of those needing alcohol and other drug treatment receive it, either due to lack of available space or funding, or because users are often in denial.

Substance abuse refers to patterns of use that result in health problems or impairment in social, psychological, or occupational functioning. Substance abuse involves compulsive use, craving, and increased tolerance.

Once a person is dependent on a substance, abuse becomes a chronic, relapsing condition generally characterized by waves of abuse, decreased use, and repeated abuse. It is very difficult to quit or curtail use of the substance and frequently, more than one attempt is needed. Sometimes attempts to stop span a long period of time before a person successfully quits or gets his/her use under control. The likelihood of relapse remains high.

When used for long periods of time, alcohol and other drugs can impair most major organ systems. For example, frequent use of alcohol and other drugs is considered to be a major risk factor for cardiac and blood vessel disease and can also cause Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and pregnancy complications in women. Tobacco use leads to chronic bronchitis and emphysema, cancers, infections, and can also cause pregnancy complications. Risky behaviors associated with alcohol and illicit drug use increase the risk of acquiring HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, and other preventable diseases.

Substance abuse treatment is effective for many people and can decrease the use of alcohol and other drug use. For some people brief interventions can be effective, while others require more intensive services and multiple rounds of treatment.

In response to this illness and its related effects, the Massachusetts legislature passed the Comprehensive Alcoholism Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1971. This abolished the crime of public intoxication and provided for the establishment of detoxification and other alcohol treatment facilities. Following this law, the Driver Alcohol Education Program of 1974 gave the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS) responsibility for alcohol education programming for people convicted of drunk driving. In 1994, another Drunk Driving Law was passed to include a second offender aftercare treatment program, which is regulated by DPH.

BOARD OF HEALTH RESPONSIBILITIES

- Since alcohol and other drug use is a treatable illness, many deaths and losses can be reduced when treatment is offered.
- Referring individuals to substance abuse treatment and prevention programs within the geographical area is a positive role that local boards of health can continue to play.

If individuals or groups are concerned about alcohol and other drug problems in their area or are in need of additional services, they can contact their local regional office of the Department of Public Health. The location and phone number of the regional office in your community can be reached by contacting the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services at (617) 624-5111. The nearest substance abuse treatment program can be located by calling the Massachusetts Alcohol

and Drug Hotline at 1-800-327-5050.

Local boards of health can promote the prevention of substance abuse and related illnesses such as HIV, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B by continuing to provide educational and health promotional material and activities to the community. Staff and clients of substance abuse treatment programs can benefit from local health fairs, immunization and testing clinics and tobacco education/cessation programs.

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Bureau of Substance Abuse Services is guided by:

M.G.L. c. 111B, Alcoholism Treatment and Rehabilitation Law;
M.G.L. c. 90 §24D, Driver Alcohol Education and Treatment Law;
related laws M.G.L.c. 17 §14, M.G.L. c. 6A §16, M.G.L. c. 123 §35, M.G.L. c. 19 §1,
M.G.L. c. 125 §16.

The BSAS promotes the Commonwealth's public health by funding and providing assistance to community programs designed to reduce alcohol and other drug use as well as address the consequences of addiction and dependency.

The Bureau:

- Funds 279 treatment programs, 49 youth programs, and 10 regional Prevention Centers;
- Funds specialized services to meet the needs of target populations and statewide services to enhance the treatment system;
- Advocates for effective public policies;
- Collaborates with public and private agencies;
- Promotes primary prevention services directed to communities and individuals;
- Provides a comprehensive system of intervention, treatment, and rehabilitation services for medically indigent individuals without public or private health insurance;
- Develops standards and regulates the delivery of substance abuse services;
- Assists in the development and implementation of policies that promote tobacco free environments and supports the treatment of nicotine addiction in substance abuse treatment settings;
- Designs and implements new service models;
- Provides training to enhance substance abuse treatment skills;
- Conducts needs assessments, research and evaluation studies.

Information regarding BSAS services can be obtained by contacting:

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS)
250 Washington Street, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 624-5111 (617) 624-5186 (TTY)
FAX (617) 624-5185