Substance Abuse and Communities

According to a recent publication from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), substance abuse takes a tremendous toll on America’s communities. According to SAMHSA’s “Community Conversations About Mental Health: Information Brief,” the following statistics describe the co-occurring condition of mental illness and substance use:

- In 2011, an estimated 20.6 million persons (8.0 percent of the population aged 12 or older) were classified with substance dependence or abuse in the past year.
- 19.3 million persons (7.5 percent of the population aged 12 or older) needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem but did not receive treatment.
- Approximately eight million adults have co-occurring disorders.
- Only 6.9 percent of individuals receive treatment for both conditions while 56.6 percent receive no treatment at all.
- Co-occurring mental and substance use disorder rates are high among people who experience homelessness.
- One study reported a 23 percent lifetime prevalence rate of co-occurring disorders for individuals who experience homelessness, and these people may face complex physical, social, and psychological challenges to recovery.
With treatment, emergency room visits, hospital stays, and periods of incarceration are significantly reduced. Likewise, high-risk and harmful substance use is decreased. Stable housing along with supportive services provides a higher quality, self-directed, and satisfying life in the community.

For more information on substance abuse and communities, please see “Community Conversations About Mental Health: Information Brief” published in 2013 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Or, for further information regarding substance use please contact Dr. Karen Kuehn Howell at the Center for Maternal Substance Abuse and Child Development, Emory University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 12 Executive Park Drive NE, Atlanta, Georgia, 30329. You can also phone us at 404-712-9829 or visit our website at http://www.emory.edu/MSACD

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