



# Understanding Substance Use Treatment Options

Substance use disorder (SUD) affects millions of individuals and families around the world. In the U.S. alone, 16.7% of Americans aged 12 and older have battled an SUD, and 10.5% of Americans aged 12 and older had an alcohol use disorder (AUD) in the past year, according to a 2022 United States National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

While most people think of traditional residential rehabilitation centers as the most common form of treatment for SUD, they are just one of many available options. Knowing the full range of treatment choices that are available can help individuals and families make informed decisions that best meet their unique needs.

## The Complexity of Substance Use Disorders

SUDs are characterized by an inability to control the use of substances despite knowing about the harmful consequences. This condition can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or socioeconomic background. The complexity of SUD requires a multifaceted approach to treatment, as each person's experience with addiction is unique. Effective treatments require addressing not only the physical aspects of addiction, but also the psychological, social and emotional components of the condition.

## Outpatient Programs: Flexibility and Continuity

Outpatient treatment is a flexible option for individuals seeking help while maintaining their daily responsibilities. These programs typically involve a series of scheduled sessions with health care professionals, including counselors, psychologists and medical doctors.

There are various levels of outpatient care, from intensive outpatient programs (IOPs) to standard outpatient services. IOPs are more comprehensive, often requiring several hours of therapy and counseling per week, while standard outpatient services may involve weekly or bi-weekly sessions. Outpatient programs are particularly beneficial for individuals with mild to moderate SUD, those who have completed a residential program, or those who require ongoing support.

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## Community Recovery Groups: Building a Supportive Community

Community support programs are another valuable treatment option, offering participants the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges in a supportive environment. This type of support helps reduce feelings of isolation, as participants realize they are not alone in their struggles. It also provides a space for individuals to learn from others, develop coping strategies and build a network of support.

There are many varieties of community support, including well-known programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), as well as other non-12-step groups. These meetings can be tailored to specific demographics, such as gender-specific groups, LGBTQ+ groups or groups for individuals with co-occurring mental health disorders.

## Medication-Assisted Treatment: Integrating Medication and Therapy

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) combines medication with counseling and behavioral therapies, providing a “whole-patient” approach to treatment. MAT is particularly effective for treating opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder, as it can help to alleviate withdrawal symptoms and reduce cravings. Common medications used in MAT include methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone.

MAT can be administered in various settings, including outpatient clinics, residential treatment centers and primary care offices. It is important to note that MAT is not a “one-size-fits-all” solution. It should be tailored to the individual’s specific needs and monitored by health care professionals.

## Holistic and Alternative Therapies: Complementary Approaches

In addition to traditional and medical treatments, many individuals find value in holistic and alternative therapies such as yoga, meditation, acupuncture and art therapy. These approaches focus on treating the whole person — mind, body and spirit. Holistic therapies can help individuals develop mindfulness, reduce stress and enhance overall well-being, making them a valuable complement to more conventional treatment methods.

## The Importance of Aftercare and Ongoing Support

Recovery from SUD is an ongoing process that requires continuous effort and support. Aftercare programs, such as sober living houses, alumni groups and continued therapy, play a crucial role in maintaining sobriety and preventing relapse. These programs provide a structured environment and ongoing support, helping individuals navigate the challenges of everyday life without resorting to substance use.

## #SupportSobriety

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or addiction, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

