

Preventing and Reducing Stigma: Health Care



Why Does it Matter?

Since 2016, More than 65,000 Americans have died from overdose deaths in rural and urban communities across the United States. Due to substance use disorder (SUD) morbidities and mortalities, many have sought help from the healthcare system.

Healthcare is defined as an organized system that strives to maintain or improve health by delivering services focused on prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. Healthcare professionals are a central part of this system, where they strive to improve access and quality health care.

Healthcare professionals, specifically providers, may be concerned about their patient's SUD and how to provide quality care in treating it. Yet inadequate training, knowledge, or support structures for providers contribute to the stigmatization of people with SUD, resulting in poor quality of care and lower patient engagement and care retention levels.

What Can We Do?

- Healthcare institutions should incorporate SUD in educational and training curriculum to improve capabilities for SUD screening, diagnosis, and treatment.
- Establish healthcare and community partnerships to improve resource capacity, including access to and integration of addiction medicine specialists for populations with SUD.
- Create clear mechanisms for patients to report concerns regarding stigma or instances of mistreatment.

What is the Impact?

- Healthcare professionals may be less involved in the patient care process, including long-term follow-up care, and have a more task-oriented care approach. Patients may feel less connected to care, which can lead to poor treatment outcomes.
- Disconnection of care among providers and patients may be perceived as substandard health delivery services. Providers may experience emotional burnout due to inadequate support from peers, including substance use experts and counselors.
- The lack of knowledge on SUD, particularly on screening, diagnosis, and treatment, may impact the provider's comfort level on meeting the physical and psychosocial needs of patients with SUD. Primary healthcare providers often report that they lack the resources to improve treatment outcomes.
- Providers who are unfamiliar with the science of addiction are more likely to be frustrated when their patients relapse; they may associate the behavior with moral failing.
- Patients with SUDs are less likely to seek medical care because they fear judgment.
- Health professionals' negative attitudes diminish patients' feelings of empowerment and subsequent treatment.



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Resources

[Preventing and Reducing Stigma: Health Care](#)



Online Learning: [Addressing Stigma and Substance Use Disorders: A HealtheKnowledge Course](#)



Web page: [Great Lakes PTTC, Preventing and Reducing Stigma](#)



Podcast: [Spotlight on Stigma Series: First Responders](#)



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