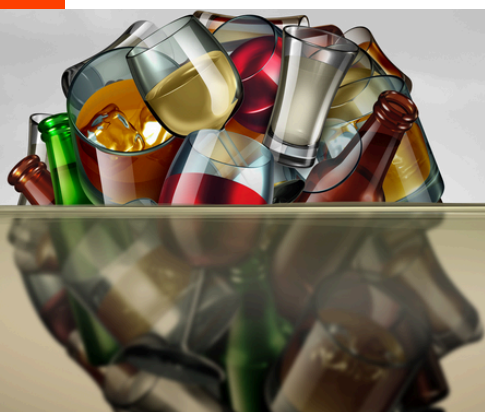




DEIB NEWSLETTER, APRIL 16TH, 2025

# ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH



**APRIL IS NATIONAL ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH: A TIME TO PAUSE, REFLECT, AND HAVE HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOW ALCOHOL AFFECTS OUR LIVES, OUR FAMILIES, AND OUR COMMUNITIES. WHETHER IT'S ABOUT RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF ALCOHOL MISUSE, SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE, OR SIMPLY MAKING MORE MINDFUL CHOICES, THIS MONTH IS ABOUT RAISING AWARENESS WITHOUT JUDGMENT AND ENCOURAGING HEALTHIER HABITS FOR EVERYONE.**

## HOW DOES ALCOHOLISM EFFECT THE BODY?

After the first drink you take during the day, your judgment is impaired. Even with a low blood alcohol level such as 0.02%. There technically is no 'safe' amount of alcohol one can consume on that basis alone. Judgment impairment can lead to poor decisions and risky behavior that can result in a reduce of lifespan across the board. At the same time there are other more direct effects alcohol can inflict on the human body.

- **Cirrhosis and Liver Disease:** Among the 96,610 liver disease deaths the US experienced in 2023 44.5% of them involved alcohol abuse. The condition Cirrhosis is a late stage scarring of the liver that can be caused by too much alcohol being processed by the liver over a long period of time and can be fatal.
- **Cardiovascular Disease:** Blood pressure can be raised by alcohol intake, which in turn increases the risk of stroke or contributing to heart disease.
- **Psychological Issues:** Alcohol abuse can influence the way we think overall even when not intoxicated. Common consequences are depression, anxiety and other disorders that effect mood.
- **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome:** When a pregnant person consumes alcohol, the baby absorbs some of that alcohol and this can severely effect a baby's sensitive development. Babies born with fetal alcohol syndrome are effected for their whole life and may have cognitive issues, physical abnormlaities or impairments, or effects on growth and/or development.

## STAYING ABOVE THE WATER LINE

Substance abuse remains a pressing and persistent issue among the U.S. According to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, more than 1 in 10 veterans seeking medical care at the VA for the first time are diagnosed with a substance use disorder (SUD). Among these individuals, alcohol dependency is by far the most common, accounting for nearly 80% of all substance-related diagnoses. This makes alcohol not only the most frequently abused substance among veterans—but also a major public health concern within this community. Even more troubling is the fact that the rate of alcohol use disorder (AUD) among veterans is nearly double that of the civilian population. Within the veteran demographic, male veterans are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with AUD than their female counterparts. These numbers reflect more than statistics—they reveal a pattern of disproportionate impact, one that calls for increased attention, understanding, and targeted support.

## WHY ALCOHOL?

The reasons behind this high rate of alcohol abuse are complex, shaped by multiple factors that intersect across military life, mental health, and societal attitudes.

- **Cultural Norms in Military Service:** Alcohol use is deeply rooted in military culture, often serving as a way to bond with peers, celebrate, and cope with stress. This normalized behavior can follow veterans into civilian life, making it harder to spot when casual drinking becomes dependency.
- **Easy Access and Social Acceptance:** Unlike illicit drugs, alcohol is legal, affordable, and widely available. It's often viewed as a socially acceptable way to unwind, which can mask problematic use. Veterans coping with trauma or stress may turn to alcohol because it's accessible, familiar, and doesn't carry the same stigma as other substances.
- **Mental Health and Self-Medication:** Many veterans live with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions as a result of their service. When access to mental health care is limited—or when seeking help feels stigmatized—alcohol becomes a form of self-medication. What starts as a coping mechanism can quickly escalate into addiction.
- **Challenges in Civilian Transition:** Returning to civilian life can bring a host of difficulties: finding meaningful employment, reconnecting with family, reestablishing identity, and navigating a lack of structure. These challenges often lead to feelings of isolation, frustration, or purposelessness—all of which can increase the risk of substance use as a way to cope.

# HOW DO WE DEFINE ALCOHOLISM?

Drinking alcohol is a common part of many people's lives—whether it's during celebrations, dinners, or social events. But for some, drinking can get out of hand and start to cause serious problems. This is when it may be more than just "heavy drinking"—it could be a medical condition known as Alcohol Use Disorder, or AUD. AUD is diagnosed when someone's drinking begins to hurt their daily life, their health, or their relationships. Doctors look for certain signs to make this diagnosis. For example, someone may be drinking more than they meant to or trying to cut back and failing. They might spend a lot of time drinking or recovering from it, or feel strong cravings that make it hard to stop. Some people miss work or struggle with family responsibilities because of drinking. Others continue drinking even though it's clearly causing issues with their mood, health, or relationships. Some people stop doing things they used to enjoy because drinking has taken over. In more serious cases, people start drinking in dangerous situations—like before driving—or they build up a tolerance, meaning they need more alcohol to feel the same effect. Withdrawal symptoms like shaking, sweating, or anxiety when they stop drinking are also common signs. Doctors group AUD into three levels: mild, moderate, and severe. The number of symptoms someone shows helps determine the level of care they need. One of the challenges with AUD is that it often doesn't happen all at once. It can sneak up on someone over time. That's why early signs should not be ignored. The good news is that help is available, and treatment does work. Treatment looks different for everyone. Some people may aim to quit alcohol entirely, while others might take steps to cut back in a way that's safer for them. This is called a "harm reduction" approach, and it can be a helpful starting point—especially for people who aren't ready to stop drinking completely. Doctors and counselors can help find a plan that fits someone's needs, including support groups, therapy, and sometimes medication.

Even though treatment for alcohol use disorder is available and effective, many people still don't get the help they need. A recent study from Denmark sheds light on the real-world barriers that keep people from seeking support—and the findings are important for anyone who wants to better understand the challenges of recovery. One of the biggest roadblocks is **stigma**. Many individuals with AUD worry about being judged by others or labeled as having a "problem." They fear the reactions of family, friends, coworkers, or even health professionals. This shame can be especially strong for those with more severe drinking habits, who often avoid treatment altogether or try to manage it on their own in private. For some, the idea of walking into a treatment center or even talking to a doctor about their drinking feels too overwhelming—and too risky. The study also found that women who drank heavily were especially likely to fear the consequences of seeking help. Many worried about being seen as bad parents or losing custody of their children. Others feared that seeking treatment could affect their relationships or professional lives. These fears, while understandable, often lead to delays in getting care—or no care at all. But the truth is, AUD is a medical condition, not a moral failure. And just like with any health issue, getting help early can make recovery easier and more successful. Breaking down these barriers starts with changing how we talk about alcohol use. That means replacing blame and judgment with understanding and support. It also means making treatment more accessible, whether through confidential counseling, online programs, or healthcare providers trained to offer compassionate, non-judgmental care. When we reduce stigma and create a culture where asking for help is seen as a strength—not a weakness—we give more people a real chance at recovery.

## BARRIERS TO TREATMENT

## A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN MEN



Alcoholism and mental health are inextricably linked. According to the Association of American Colleges, men specifically are four times more likely to commit suicide than

women. In contrast, they are diagnosed with depression and mood disorders at significantly lower rates. This disparity is partly due to societal expectations that discourage emotional expression and a healthcare system that often misinterprets or overlooks symptoms in men. Men may exhibit depression through behaviors like irritability, substance use, or aggression, which are sometimes misread as character flaws rather than signs of mental health issues. Additionally, stigma and fear of judgment prevent many men from seeking help. To improve mental health outcomes for men, it's crucial to provide gender-sensitive care, challenge harmful stereotypes, and create supportive environments that encourage open discussions about mental health. Seeking counseling can be an important step on the road to better self regulation.

## RESOURCES:

If you are struggling with substance abuse, mental health, or suicidal thoughts please contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** for 24/7 crisis support. They also provide online chat support!



Founded in 1935, **Alcoholics Anonymous** (AA) is among the most ubiquitous mutual-aid services in the world and has helped people with alcohol dependency using a peer-led fellowship and support. Click [here](#) to find a AA chapter near you!



**SAMHSA** (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) is a 24/7, year-round, treatment referral service for those who don't know where to start. Click [here](#) for more information,



The US Department of Veterans Affairs provides counseling services at their medical facilities, scan the QR Code to the left or click [here](#) to find a VA facility in your area!

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