

Published on *VeteransNavigator* (<https://veteransnavigator.org>)

Treatment Programs for Substance Use Problems

Overview

Substance use can be a slippery slope, especially for those facing other challenges, including mental health concerns or life stressors. For instance, when people are stressed, anxious, depressed, or overwhelmed, they may be more likely to have trouble controlling alcohol and drug use. Despite the temporary relief a substance may seem to provide, increased substance use can lead to harmful consequences.

What Is Substance Use Disorder (SUD)?

Often referred to as "addiction," [substance use disorder](#) (SUD) is a disease that causes people to have difficulty controlling their use of alcohol, drugs, and other substances, including opioids. Untreated, this misuse can begin to influence many aspects of life.

Signs and Symptoms of SUD

- Increased urge to drink or to use drugs.
- Inability to stop drinking or using drugs.
- Drinking or using drugs in hazardous situations (e.g., drinking and driving).
- Change in relationships due to drinking or drug use.
- Feeling sick and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when drinking or drug use stops.
- Increased tolerance, which refers to the need over time for more alcohol or stronger drugs to achieve the desired effect.

Fortunately, there are many ways to recover from alcohol or drug use disorders. Take the next step and learn about the many VA treatments available, including in- and outpatient care, medications, support groups, specialized therapy, and more.

Substance Use Treatment

No matter what you are experiencing, treatments and resources are available. VA offers treatment options that are proven to be very effective for most people, and many types of professionals at VA can help treat substance use.

[Evidence-based therapies](#) are among the most effective treatments for substance use. They can include the following — which are in many cases available at a local VA medical center.

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)** helps Veterans with substance use disorders develop more balanced and helpful thoughts about themselves, others, and the future. It can help Veterans manage the urge to drink or use drugs, refuse opportunities to use substances, use a problem-solving approach to deal with substance use, and achieve personal goals.
- **Motivational Interviewing (MI)** helps Veterans with substance use disorders by focusing on conversations between the Veteran and their provider to detect and strengthen personal motivations for change. This therapy looks at the reasons behind your desire to make a change and the potential benefits of that change.
- **Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET)** helps Veterans with substance use disorders by focusing on conversations between the Veteran and their provider to detect and strengthen personal motivations for change. This therapy looks at the reasons behind your desire to make a change and the potential benefits of that change. MET is a version of MI that focuses specifically on changing alcohol and/or substance use.

> Explore more potential treatment options at VA by visiting the [Learn About Treatment](#) page.

Medications

Substance use disorder is a disease that needs treatment, medication, and sometimes counseling, just like other diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure. VA offers proven options for controlling alcohol and drug addiction. These options include medications that can reduce cravings, prevent relapse, and reduce the risk of death related to substance use:

Opioid Use Disorder Treatment

Research has shown that behavioral therapy in combination with medication (commonly referred to as medication-assisted treatment, or MAT) is the most effective treatment for opioid use disorder. Patients undergoing therapy who also use MAT are more likely to remain in treatment and see improvements in social functioning. Talk to your VHA provider today to learn more about treatments for opioid use disorder.

If you or a Veteran you know has been diagnosed with opioid use disorder, it is important to learn about [naloxone](#), an emergency overdose medication.

Take the Next Step

Whether you are worried about your own substance use or that of someone you care about, VA has many options to help you take the next step. Explore the following resources to help you get started.

Schedule a mental health appointment

- **If you're already using VA health care**, ask your primary care provider to help you make an appointment for VA mental health services.
- **If you're not already using VA health care**, contact your nearest VA medical center to talk about your needs. [Find your nearest VA medical center or Vet Center](#).
- **New to VA? Apply for health care benefits.** Getting started is simple. Create a free account online to help ease your enrollment process. [Start your application today](#).

Find support

- The [VA SUD program locator](#) will help you find local VA treatment programs that address all types of problems related to substance use — from health effects to life-threatening behaviors.
- Our [Summary of VA Treatment Programs for Substance Use Problems webpage](#) provides more extensive information on the types of treatment programs available.

Article Source

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Source URL

<https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov>

Last Reviewed

Wednesday, July 10, 2024