

1998/99 Monthly Action Kit

# **CAMPAIGN FOR TREATMENT**

## **Educating Our Legislators**



***JOIN TOGETHER***

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August 1998

## CAMPAIGN FOR TREATMENT: EDUCATING OUR LEGISLATORS

In September, we observe National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month. This year's observance focuses on treatment as a community investment, and offers an opportunity for community leaders to work with their state and federal legislators to shape 1999 legislative priorities that support treatment for those in need. This coming year, candidates and legislators can take the leadership and offer policy changes to insure quality addiction treatment, including funding to expand treatment capacity, treatment parity, and drug courts.

Many of the organizers of this spring's Bill Moyers "Close To Home" state capitol events point out that increasing numbers of legislators are willing to view addiction treatment as a means of improving workplace productivity, reducing criminal activity, and reducing abuse of alcohol and drugs. These events, co-hosted with Public Broadcasting System member stations, were particularly successful when legislators were personally invited to participate by their constituents and supporters. From these events, we also learned that elected officials are more likely to respond to requests to consider taking action if:

- ← Legislators and other policy leaders are involved at an early stage in helping to frame the discussion and legislative initiatives.
- ← Local constituents, with diverse professional and community interests, initiate and maintain personal contact on the issue.
- ← Local advocacy efforts are seen as part of a credible statewide or national constituency. While addiction treatment is perceived by some as a narrow issue, it is not, and legislators respond when credible constituents, spanning several sectors and institutions, publicly agree that treatment is effective.

Timing is everything: the summer and fall are critical for preparing for November elections, as well as for the 1999 legislative sessions. To be effective, you will want to spend the summer working with other groups around the state to place information about the need to expand addiction treatment in the hands of every incumbent and candidate. This kit offers some key facts about this issue, including the effectiveness of treatment. Additional information can be found in the resources listings.

As important as understanding these facts, however, is the mobilization that this advocacy effort requires. This involves building a constituents network and forming a strategy with timely assignments for individual leaders to stay in touch with legislators and candidates in their community during the election campaign and throughout the legislative session.

Legislators and candidates for key elective offices are influenced by the views of treatment presented by individual constituents and by local media. Reach both policy makers and constituents by effective media advocacy, including op-ed commentary and letters to the editor. The model op-ed in this kit can get you started. This kit also lists Internet-based resources and provides a faxback so we can learn more about what you are doing and what is working. We have also included policy response highlights from the Join Together 1998 National Survey.

Take Action: mobilize your own legislative and congressional districts; connect with existing statewide grass roots efforts; initiate your own statewide advocacy network; locate additional information about addiction treatment to educate legislators (especially those who have leadership positions) and other policy makers; convene voter and candidate information events, such as candidate forums, policy panels and town meetings; and assist your legislator during the 1999 legislative session to enact legislation that brings effective addiction treatment to your community.

For more information, call Bob Downing, director of Public Policy Panels at Join Together or send an email to [bob@jointogether.org](mailto:bob@jointogether.org). You can also visit Join Together Online at [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org) where you will find a wealth of policy resources, including a "Legislative Toolbox."

## THE FACT IS . . .

**Substance abuse is a major, preventable public health problem that affects millions of people in the United States — both directly and indirectly. It also places enormous financial and social burdens on society. When left unchecked, alcohol and drug abuse can destroy families, waste taxpayers' money, create unnecessary health care costs, make neighborhoods unsafe and overwhelm the criminal justice and social service systems.**

### **Consider the following facts:**

- < A total of 13 million people ages 12 or older used an illicit drug during the past month, according to a recent National Household Survey of Drug Abuse. In addition, 11 million Americans reported heavy alcohol use and 32 million people reported “binge” drinking during the previous month.
- < In 1996, cocaine-related episodes accounted for 30 percent of all hospital emergency room drug-related visits, with “dependence” commonly being reported as the motive for drug use. This comes from the 1996 Drug Abuse Warning Network Surveillance Report.
- < By the year 2000, the nation will pay \$100-million per day or more to incarcerate people with serious alcohol and drug problems, if current trends continue. This projection comes from *Behind Bars, Substance Abuse and America's Prison Population*, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 1998.

**Addiction is a chronic, relapsing disease,  
for which treatment IS effective.  
Providing adequate substance  
abuse treatment makes our communities safer, keeps our families healthier and lowers health care costs.**

### **The following facts come from the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's 1997 National Treatment Improvement Evaluation Study:**

- < One year after treatment, clients' use of their primary drug(s) declined from 73 percent to 38 percent.
- < Drug use declined by more than 40 percent among women in treatment for as long as a year after completion.
- < Treatment reduced illegal activity by 49 percent among respondents who reported supporting themselves by committing crimes.
- < Clients receiving welfare declined from 40 percent to 35 percent following treatment.

For more information about treatment, see Join Together's Policy Panel Report, *Treatment for Addiction: Advancing the Common Good*. You can download this document directly from Join Together Online at [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org) or call (617) 437-1500 and request a free copy to be sent to you.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**There is a lot you can do to educate legislators and candidates for public office about the importance of providing substance abuse treatment for all who need it. Here are some action steps that can truly make a difference:**

1. Work with others to form a network in your state, or participate in one if it already exists. Assign a leader from each legislative district who will select and coordinate individuals to educate and inform candidates and legislators in their district about the efficacy of cost-benefit of treatment.
2. Schedule a meeting with every current elected and appointed official in your community, as well as with candidates running for local offices. Tell them what you would like them to do to reduce substance abuse. Provide them with copies of the fact sheet included in this kit (or better yet, create a fact sheet describing local trends and statistics) to make your case that treatment is cost-effective.
3. Build alliances with other groups in the community — including civic organizations, schools, police, health care organizations, youth and parent groups, district attorneys and others — and work together toward common goals such as educating legislators about the need for expanded treatment services. These partnerships are essential to address alcohol and drug problems.
4. To observe National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Sept.), link with others throughout your legislative district and state to sponsor special events with members of Congress, state legislators and other officials. Use these events as a way to let recovering people tell their stories, and to provide information that explains the benefits and efficacy of treatment.
5. Host a town meeting to discuss your local treatment needs and to look at what services currently exist. Ask participants to identify any gaps and make suggestions for what can be done to improve the situation. Call on all residents who attend to share suggested changes by writing a letter or calling their elected officials and candidates.
6. Schedule an editorial board meeting with your local newspaper during National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month to brief them on how substance abuse is affecting your community. Ask editors to write an editorial urging legislators to support expanded treatment services. Contact your local radio station and offer an expert guest for a call-in program on this issue.
7. Involve youth in your efforts. Engage students and local youth groups by asking them to help you brief legislators and candidates about the problems they face when addiction is left untreated and to make the case for expanded services for themselves and adult family members.

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## WHAT YOUR COLLEAGUES TOLD US

Join Together recently conducted its Fourth National Survey on the Community Movement Against Substance Abuse and Gun Violence. Over 4,000 people, representing each of the 50 states, responded to our survey questionnaire. Here's what they told us:

- ← Almost half (47 percent) of respondents said they work somewhat or extensively on the issues of treatment. One quarter (25 percent) of them said they have increased their activities in this area lately.
- ← Half (49 percent) of respondents said they have been somewhat/very influential in increasing treatment programs in their communities.

- ← More than half (58 percent) of respondents said they are more likely now to be involved in efforts to change public policy than they were five years ago.

When asked to rate the ease or difficulty for someone in the community to access treatment services, most respondents say it is somewhat difficult. It is particularly hard to find inpatient or long-term residential programs, and methadone maintenance.

- ← Ninety-five percent of respondents said they support or strongly support increasing the availability of treatment for all who need it.
- ← Ninety-four percent of respondents support or strongly support increasing funds for treatment on demand.
- ← Ninety percent support or strongly support mandatory treatment instead of jail for nonviolent offenders.

Respondents to Join Together's Survey recognize the importance of working with other groups in order to be more effective. In fact, close to nine out of 10 respondents said they have been successful in increasing interorganizational collaboration recently. These coalitions recognize that no single approach can reduce community drug and alcohol abuse. Parents can't do it alone. Neither can teachers, cops, ministers, counselors, doctors or judges. Successful initiatives require an agreed-upon strategy involving key leaders throughout the community.

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## **QUESTIONS TO ASK CANDIDATES RUNNING FOR PUBLIC OFFICE**

It is important that candidates running for public office in your state make their views known about substance abuse and treatment. You can help raise the issue by asking candidates the following questions:

- ← Will you support a treatment system that ensures treatment for everyone who wants to recover from alcohol and drug dependence?
- ← Will you support sentences that help close the revolving door by requiring treatment as part of the sanctions for offenders with alcohol and drug dependencies?
- ← Will you support comprehensive community-based prevention programs during school and non-school hours, to help our children and adolescents face the risks and pressures of alcohol and drug abuse and to cope with the addictions of family members?
- ← Will you insist on a coordinated approach to community drug and alcohol abuse reduction, including public funding that requires prevention, treatment, workplace and criminal justice initiatives to join together?
- ← Will you support parity to provide addiction treatment on an equal basis with treatment for other diseases?

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## OP-ED

You can tailor the following op-ed with some local examples and statistics or keep it as is, and send it to the editor of your local newspaper.

### **ADDICTION TREATMENT MUST BE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL**

A person should not have to commit a crime in order to receive treatment for an addiction. Yet our policies may be sending a very different message to the many people being turned away from treatment programs, which can not accommodate the high demand for their services.

Drug courts and prison treatment programs are important options for offenders with addictions within the criminal justice system. But we must also remember to provide treatment options for those who need them outside of this jurisdiction.

Both Congress and your state legislature will face this issue during the next session. Therefore, we must take the time to educate each and every elected official and candidate running for office about the need for addiction treatment and its cost-effectiveness. Consider these facts:

- < Today an estimated 18 million Americans abuse or are addicted to alcohol. Some 12.8 million (or about 6 percent of the nation's population age 12 and over) have used illegal drugs within the past 30 days.
- < The economic cost of addiction is staggering. Every man, woman and child in the United States pays \$1,000 a year in unnecessary costs associated with health care, extra law enforcement, car crashes, crime and lost workplace productivity that results from substance abuse. The emotional and psychological costs are immeasurable.
- < No other disease goes untreated to anywhere near the extent of substance abuse.
- < Like cancer and other serious chronic diseases, alcohol and drug dependence can require a lengthy recovery that can include relapse and the need to use different therapies. In fact, addiction treatment is often more effective than treatment for other diseases. Two out of three patients who are in treatment for a year or longer are drug-free one year later, which is twice the rate for patients whose treatment lasts only three months.
- < Treatment for all addicted people in the U.S. would save more than \$10 billion in social costs per year, while costing only \$2.1 billion, according to a study by the Rand Corporation.

Share these facts with your legislators. Encourage them to take action to enact policies that ensure adequate, accessible treatment for every person with an addiction who wants to recover from it. This will ultimately reduce crime, lower our health care costs and create a safer and healthier community for us all.

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## WEB RESOURCES

*The following web sites are a few of the Internet resources that offer information to guide your advocacy efforts:*

**Alcohol Policies Project, Center for Science in the Public Interest**

[www.cspinet.org/booze/](http://www.cspinet.org/booze/)

Monitors federal and state alcohol policy.

**Center for Substance Abuse Treatment**

[www.samhsa.gov/csat/csat.htm](http://www.samhsa.gov/csat/csat.htm)

Disseminates federal addiction treatment funding. Describes the National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month.

**Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America**

[www.cadca.org/cadcahom.htm](http://www.cadca.org/cadcahom.htm)

Monitors public policy; provides technical assistance to community coalitions.

**Legal Action Center**

[www.lac.org/](http://www.lac.org/)

Advocates for effective addiction treatment and prevention policy.

**Marin Institute for Prevention of Alcohol and Other Drug Problems**

[www.marininstitute.org](http://www.marininstitute.org)

Helps communities establish local policies; provides advocacy training to groups.

**National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws**

[www.natlalliance.org](http://www.natlalliance.org)

Provides model statutes.

**National Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors**

[www.naadac.org](http://www.naadac.org)

Offers materials on effective advocacy and treatment policy issues, e.g., parity.

**National Conference of State Legislatures**

[www.ncsl.org/](http://www.ncsl.org/)

Provides information on state legislative priorities and links to individual legislatures.

**National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse**

[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

Federal agency with research role for alcohol abuse issues.

**National Institute on Drug Abuse**

[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

Federal agency with research responsibilities for drug treatment and prevention.

**Office of National Drug Control Policy**

[www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov)

President's drug policy agency; provides national data and federal strategy.

**Physician Leadership for National Drug Policy**

<http://center.butler.brown.edu/plndp/>

Physicians policy statement on illicit drug problems.

**Project Vote Smart**

<http://www.vote-smart.org/ce/>

Maintains contact information and issue profiles for state and federal elected officials and candidates.

*For additional Web resources, visit **Join Together Online** at [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org).*

**FAXBACK: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

What are you doing to educate leaders about the need for treatment services in your community and/or state? Join Together wants to know. Please answer the following questions and fax this form back to: **Bob Downing at (617) 437-9394**

Name:

Title:

Organization:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip:

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:

What substance abuse issues are you working on in your community or state?  
(Please check all that apply.)

- Expanding local treatment capacity outside the criminal justice system
- Working with courts and corrections to provide treatment for offenders who need it
- Establishing parity to provide addiction treatment like other chronic diseases
- Working with others to help develop a comprehensive substance abuse strategy
- Other (list) \_\_\_\_\_

Which other groups do you involve in your efforts around treatment?  
(Please check all that apply.)

- Justice system
- Labor
- Elected officials
- Employers
- Health care providers
- Parents
- Other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

When was the last time you met with state legislators about treatment issues in your area and what was the outcome?

(Please explain.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How are you planning to organize constituent contact with legislators this fall?  
(Please check all that apply.)

- meet with legislators and candidates
- provide testimony for legislative hearing
- distribute materials to legislators

- \_\_\_ meet with partners to continue collaboration
- \_\_\_ editorial board meeting with local paper or broadcaster
- \_\_\_ Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Organize district-level network to link with legislators and candidates

What can we do to help your efforts?

(Please explain) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*You can also email responses back to [bob@jointogether.org](mailto:bob@jointogether.org)*