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Issue 5

Alaska Medicaid Newsletter

Important information for you as an Alaska Medicaid Participant

Inside This Issue

Substance Use
Disorder (SUD)

How do I know if I
have a
Substance Use
Disorder

Peer Support
Corner

Every Step
Matters

Upcoming Events

Make a
Connection

Hotlines

Optum

Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

People may drink alcohol for all sorts of reasons - celebrating a special event, unwinding after a long day, socializing with friends, bonding over the hobby of home-brewed beers. In moderation, it might be a normal part of life. But sometimes alcohol use can become too frequent and may cause serious problems. Knowing how to name symptoms and find treatment resources at any stage can help you or a loved one struggling with alcohol use disorder.

It can be hard to know how much alcohol is considered problematic. Generally, one drink a day for women and 2 drinks a day for men is considered moderate. For example, a 12-ounce beer or 5-ounce glass of wine with dinner may not be a red flag. When those drinks turn in to 4 or more in one day, or more than 14 drinks in a single week, it may raise concerns. That's considered heavy or high-risk drinking.

Article courtesy of Optum partners at UnitedHealthcare; both companies are part of UnitedHealth Group

What are the signs of alcoholism?

- Blacking out or not remembering things that happened
- Drinking even when it causes distress or harm
- Drinking more or longer than you planned
- Feeling irritable when you're not drinking
- Frequent hangovers
- Getting into dangerous situations when drinking

Alcohol withdrawal syndrome is a set of symptoms that happen when a person suddenly stops drinking alcohol or drastically cuts back. Signs of alcohol withdrawal include:

- Anxiety
- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Insomnia
- Confusion
- Racing heart
- High blood pressure



How do I know I have a substance use disorder?



21 million Americans do struggle with a substance use disorder in some capacity. Their condition may not be controlling their life, but it's a health risk, nonetheless, and may be a reason to warrant getting help. It's important to understand what substance use disorder is so you can recognize it and try to get people help as soon as possible. Optum recommends speaking to a doctor or counselor for additional screening. Optum recommends that you see your doctor right away. You can also call a Behavioral Healthcare Navigator at 1-800-225-8764 [Substance use disorder | UnitedHealthcare \(uhc.com\)](#)

Many can be at risk of falling into unhealthy habits with substances, including alcohol. Struggling with mental health, coping with a traumatic event, or becoming physically dependent on medications post-surgery are all possible examples of how someone may find themselves with a dependency. It takes courage to admit when we have a problem. That's the first and sometimes the hardest step. Use the questions below to help get a better understanding of your (or a loved one's) relationship with substance use.

- Do I keep my use a secret from others?
- Are friends, family or co-workers concerned?
- Do I find any excuse to drink or use?
- Do I use substances to change the way I'm feeling?
- Is my substance use increasing?
- Do I make promises to stop or cut back, but never follow through?
- Do I tell myself my problem isn't that bad?
- Have I ever had a blackout (memory lapse) after using?
- Do I feel regret or shame after using?
- Do I spend more money than I can afford on alcohol or drugs?
- Am I at risk of physical danger or financial loss?
- Do I look forward to using alcohol or drugs?

Concerned about yourself or a loved one? [Substance use resources](#) are available to help you get the support you need. Call the 24-hour Substance Use Helpline at **1-855-780-5955** / TTY **711** to talk to a specialized substance use recovery advocate. You'll get confidential support, guidance on recommended treatment options, help finding a network provider and answers to many of your questions — including concerns about your personal health or care for a family member, coverage, cost of care and more. Even if you're not 100% sure it's time to take next steps, talking with a recovery advocate may help you decide what might be best for you or your someone you care about.

Article courtesy of Optum partners at UnitedHealthcare; both companies are part of UnitedHealth Group



If you're a participant or a participant advocate and have questions about Medicaid coverage, please call **1-800-225-8764**, toll-free statewide Monday — Friday 8 a.m. — 6 p.m., Alaska Time. Free language assistance services are available to you.



Peer Support Corner

Alaska winters can create challenging moments that make self-care tough. Our moods can become sad, anxious, or angry and substance use can increase in response to mood changes and holidays. Holidays can bring social, emotional, and financial stress. Relapse of mood and/or substance use may have happened during the holiday season.

If you have or have not relapsed, attending a support meeting can help. If support meetings aren't your preference, reach out to those that can help you stay accountable to your sobriety or wellbriety goals. Options include: family, friends, church members, co-workers, counselors, case managers, peer support specialists, and many others.

To keep track of goals and help others know how to support you, I highly suggest looking into making a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) for yourself. A WRAP is a tool that supports you in identifying the things that keep you well and create action plans to put them into practice.

If you're an Alaska Medicaid participant or a participant advocate and would like to talk to a Peer Support Specialist about recovery or a WRAP plan, please call **1-800-225-8764**, ext. 63116 toll-free statewide Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., Alaska Time. This is a free service. Free language assistance services are available to you.

If you are having trouble finding local groups, or cannot travel to a community setting, then Mental Health America has a list of free resources to help you connect with others.

Every Step Matters

This participant has made several trips to the hospital Emergency Department (ED) over the past year for severe alcohol withdrawal symptoms in hopes to get some relief. Every time upon returning home, the temporary fix wore off, causing a return to the ED a few weeks later. Motivated by a desire to have a job and to stop experiencing withdrawal at home, the participant accepted help from an Optum Behavioral Health Care Navigator and Peer Support Specialist (PSS). Options and referrals discussed lead the participant to go to a Detox Treatment Center. While there, the participant made a sober friend. Discovering a person is not alone in the struggle with alcohol misuse helped the participant realize there is value in connecting with others. Not being able to maintain sobriety after Detox, the participant was still able to stay engaged with the Case Management Team to overcome embarrassment and feelings of failure. Meeting personal goals and their outright courage was a huge contributor to success. Sobriety is real for the participant who is working in that dream job every day. This participant discovered that patterns don't have to be permanent, but success can.

*The above story is an Alaska Medicaid participant working with Optum Case Management and reflects real-life experiences. The life details are not necessarily representative of the whole story.

AA and NA meetings in your area:

[Find AA Meetings In Alaska](#)

[Alaska NA Meetings](#)

[Alaska Region of Narcotics Anonymous](#)

More Alaska support and meeting information:

[SAMSHA Virtual recovery programs and resources](#)

[Alaska Area 02 Meeting Schedules](#)

[Wellbriety circles in Alaska](#)

Make A Connection

Find a Provider:

Participant Access Line: 1-800-225-8764 TDD/TTY dial 711 or visit alaska.optum.com and click *Find a Provider* on left side of the page.

Get Transportation:

For Medicaid travel benefits call the Medicaid Participant Helpline at 800-770-5650, Option 2.

Live & Work Well:

You can find information about maintaining your wellness and resources for crisis support.

Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Line

9-8-8 988.alaska.gov

Veterans Crisis Line

1-800-273-8255 text 838255

Careline

1-877-266-4357 (HELP) or text 4help to 839863

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233

