

Resources for Recovery



What is Recovery?

21 million American adults considered themselves to be in recovery or to have recovered from their alcohol or other drug use problem according to the 2020 National Survey of Drug Use and Health. For nearly nine decades, public perception of recovery from substance use disorders (SUDs) has been driven by a 12-step philosophy that centers a period of sustained abstinence and the adoption of a set of moral principles to guide all of one's affairs.

Membership in the most populous 12-step community, Alcoholics Anonymous, is estimated to be only around 2 million *worldwide*, so it became clear that providers of treatment and recovery support services needed to adopt a definition of recovery from this chronic illness that is less culturally specific and has more clinical utility. In 2010, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) convened a group of stakeholders to create a working definition of recovery to help guide policy, practice, and funding.

SAMHSA defines recovery as a **process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.**

- [Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health | SAMHSA](#)
- [Working Definition of Recovery | SAMHSA](#)

How Can We Support Recovery?

Demystifying the recovery process and giving people in recovery, behavioral health recovery support services providers, and funders practical foci, the SAMHSA recovery work group went on to describe in more detail how sustained recovery processes can be supported. The four major dimensions that support a life in recovery present broad categories of potential support: home, health, community, and purpose.

Home

“A stable and safe place to live”

Home offers people a fitting place to rest and sleep – a place where they feel safe from harm – a private place of their own. Home is a basic human need, and many believe by meeting this need, we open the possibility for people to overcome many of the challenges they face, including SUD. For example, the [Housing First](#) approach prioritizes permanently housing people without preconditions and barriers, such as periods of abstinence or employment.



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Recovery Supportive Homes

Places of residence that support sustained recovery from SUDs and promote the recovery lifestyle are broadly considered to be recovery supportive homes. They are intended to be substance-free environments with structure, accountability, and peer-driven mutual support. [National Association of Recovery Residences \(NARR\)](#) describes the levels of support in its standards criteria. The spectrum of support one may receive range from Level I (democratically peer-run with no paid positions) to Level IV (service provider oversight with clinical services from credentialed staff). No statutes providing standards or oversight for this critical recovery support exist federally or in most states, so it is a *buyer beware* market. In the absence of codified regulation, NARR and [Oxford House, Inc.](#) appear to provide the most consistent standards oversight. NARR has 30 state affiliates, and houses may choose to become NARR members. Oxford House is not a NARR member, but its homes are considered to be Level I standard with a strong national network of standardization and oversight. Both NARR and Oxford House have searchable databases of available homes.



Overcoming Barriers to Finding a Home

The mission of the [US Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#) is to provide housing support and to uplift communities. Its web site is rich with resources to help people overcome barriers to finding and sustaining a home such as: rental assistance, homeownership, local public housing authorities, rent relief resources, finding homes and lenders, and knowing and protecting your rights.

HUD is currently conducting a [6-month review](#) of all its programs and policies to improve housing access to justice-involved people. Because of US drug policy, many people who experience SUD also find themselves entangled in the criminal justice system. People with certain drug convictions, including possession, are banned from accessing publicly funding housing programs.

- [Find Affordable Rental Housing | USA.gov](#)
- [Affording Housing Models and Recovery | SAMHSA](#)

Health

“Overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional wellbeing”

SUD is a complex biopsychosocial health disorder, but in Western medicine, we have a tradition of separating the body from the mind – accepting a false dichotomy between behavioral and physical health recovery management. Most agree that eating healthier and moving more make us feel better – physically and emotionally.



Benefits of Nutrition

Proper nutrition does a body good. People who eat well feel mentally, physically, and emotionally better. Nutrition’s impact on mood cannot be overstated, and a balanced diet helps people sustain a positive outlook during the recovery process. Food is also foundational to our hierarchy of needs. Unfortunately, some people seeking recovery from SUD may have little access to *any* food, much less healthy food.

- [Food Assistance | USA.gov](#)
- [Financial Assistance, Food Pantries, Medical Care, and Other Free or Reduced-Cost Help | FindHelp.org](#)

Data Supporting Nutrition Support

Nagarajan, M.K. and Goodman, D. (2020). Not Just Substance Use: The Critical Gap in Nutritional Interventions for Pregnant Women With Opioid Use Disorders. *Public Health*. Volume 180, pp. 114–116. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2019.10.025>

Wattick, R. et al. (2020). Enhancing College Student Recovery Outcomes Through Nutrition and Culinary Therapy: *Mountaineers for Recovery and Resilience*. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*. Volume 52, Issue 3, pp. 326–329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2019.11.006>

Wissm D. (2019). Chapter 2 - The Role of Nutrition in Addiction Recovery: What We Know and What We Don't. *The Assessment and Treatment of Addiction: Best Practices and New Frontiers*. pp. 21–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-54856-4.00002-X>

Jeynes, K. and Gibson, E.L. (2017). The Importance of Nutrition in Aiding Recovery From Substance Use Disorders: A Review. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. Volume 179, pp. 229–239. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2017.07.006>

Benefits of Exercise

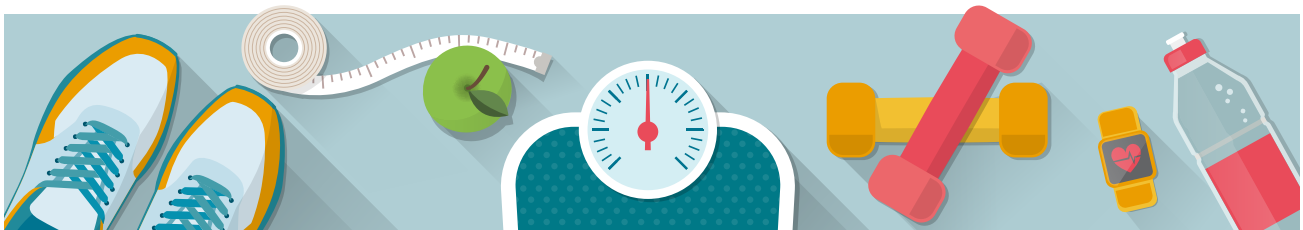
Can exercise be a beneficial component of one's chronic illness recovery management ritual? The short answer is, "of course." Exercise is good for everyone, unless one's medical provider suggests otherwise. Physical tasks are an excellent way to enhance neurotransmitter activity that promotes reward, a sense of wellbeing, and energy. According to the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), physical activity "is one of the best things people can do to improve their health. It is vital for healthy aging and can reduce the burden of chronic diseases and prevent early death." The CDC shares [community strategies to improve access to places for physical activity](#), and the World Health Organization provides [recommendations for levels of physical activity](#), including for people with disabilities.

[The Phoenix](#). The Phoenix's mission is "to build a sober active community that fuels resilience and harnesses the transformational power of connection so that together we rise, recover, and live." The Phoenix takes a novel approach to recovery by fostering healing through fitness and personal connection. They offer activities for everyone – from weightlifting and boxing to running, hiking, and yoga – all of which help people grow stronger together, overcome the stigma of addiction, and rise to their full potential. The Phoenix offers digital opportunities for physical activity in recovery supportive environments across the country and in-person in many states. The Phoenix also offers a free social app to encourage connection between members of this affinity group.

[Yoga 12 Step Recovery \(Y12SR\)](#). Y12SR's uses "a holistic model to address the physical, mental, and spiritual disease of addiction. Informed by the latest research in neuroscience and trauma healing, Y12SR 'connects the dots' by combining the somatic approach of yoga with the cognitive and social approaches of the 12-step recovery model."

Access to Harm Reduction

As a workforce, addiction services providers no longer subscribe to misguided cliches such as believing that recovery initiation requires "rock bottom" or "the gift of desperation." Today's addiction professionals understand that they must fill their kits with tools to support people in all stages of change and recovery – to meet people where they are. Harm reduction's purpose is to preserve life, reduce disease burden, and



promote compassionate connection for people who use drugs. Harm reduction celebrates any positive change. Harm reduction is health care.

The [National Harm Reduction Coalition](#) promotes the health and dignity of individuals and communities affected by drug use.

The [National Survivors Union](#) is a national drug user union. Drug users, both former and active have come together, just like a labor union -to fight for rights they currently do not have.

[NEXT Distro](#) is an “online and mail-based **harm reduction service** designed to reduce opioid overdose death, prevent injection-related disease transmission, and improve the lives of people who use drugs.” NextDistro also maintains a state-by-state listing of harm reduction resources.

Access to Healthcare

One aspect of health is ease of access to primary, preventative, and specialty health care. Many states have yet to take advantage of Medicaid expansion or implement effective efforts to promote mental health parity and addiction equity compliance. That means many people who use drugs or experience SUD may encounter very real barriers to basic health services as well as access to specialty treatment. Consumers and providers must learn what their rights and responsibilities are.

- [SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery \(SOAR\) | SAMHSA](#)
- [Health Reform’s Medicaid Expansion | CBPP](#)
- [Mental Health Parity & Addiction Equity Fact Sheet | CMS](#)
- [Parity Track | The Kennedy Forum](#)



Community

“Relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope”

With nearly 10 million views, Johann Hari’s 2015 Ted Talk [Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong](#) is popular enough that most people in the addiction services field have heard Hari’s quote saying that the opposite of addiction is human connection, not sobriety. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy describes an epidemic of loneliness in America and thought leaders like Gabor Mate and Maia Szalavitz explore the role disconnection play in our bondage to drugs. Organizations like [SeekHealing](#) in Asheville, NC, are pioneers in the emerging area of Social Health – offering digital and in vivo opportunities to make human connection. Does disconnection and loneliness contribute to our overdose and addiction crisis?

Mutual Aid Meetings

Mutual aid organizations provide peer-based, non-clinical, non-professional support meetings to people in recovery from SUD. They focus on socially-supportive communication and the exchange of skills through shared experience. Mutual aid meetings based on the 12-steps such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) are some of the most widely available psychosocial supports for people seeking recovery from SUD. Numerous alternative mutual aid organizations have emerged over the years, yet none of these are as ubiquitous as NA and AA. If available, these alternative meetings provide choice for people who may want or need their community support to have a specific flavor (e.g., secular, gender-specific, Native American, Christian, harm reduction or moderation).

- [Mutual Aid Meetings | JBS International](#)
- [Mutual Aid & Informed Consent | NASW](#)

Data Supporting Mutual Aid Meetings

12-Step Programs – Kelly, J.F., Humphreys, K., and Ferri, M. (2020). Alcoholics Anonymous and Other 12-Step Programs for Alcohol Use Disorder. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2020. Issue 3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD012880.pub2>

Other Meetings – Zemore, S.E., et al. (2018). A Longitudinal Study of the Comparative Efficacy of Women For Sobriety, LifeRing, SMART Recovery, and 12-Step Groups For Those With AUD. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*. 88, pp. 18-26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2018.02.004>

Digital Meetings – Bergman, B.G. et al. (2021). Online Recovery Support Meetings Can Help Mitigate the Public Health Consequences of COVID-19 For Individuals with Substance Use Disorder. *Addictive Behaviors*. Volume 113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2020.106661>

Recovery Community Centers (RCCs)

RCCs are peer-operated centers that serve as resources for local, community-based, non-clinical, recovery support services. RCCs can help individuals build recovery capital by providing training, improving resource access, facilitating social connection, hosting mutual aid meetings (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, Recovery Dharma), organizing recreational activities, and engaging in other community-based services, (e.g., recovery coaching, harm

reduction outreach). Data show that increased recovery capital helps people sustain recovery from SUD over time.

- [Recovery Community Organizations | JBS International](#)
- [The Association of Recovery Community Organizations \(ARCO\) | Faces & Voices of Recovery](#)

Data Supporting Recovery Community Centers

[Characterization and evaluation of addiction recovery community centers | NIH RePORT](#)

[Recovery community centers: Is participation in these newer recovery support services associated with better functioning and quality of life? | Recovery Research Institute](#)

[Study of recovery community organization participants over time shows peer-based recovery support activities are associated with modest improvement in recovery capital | Recovery Research Institute](#)



Purpose

“Meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school, volunteerism, family caretaking, creative endeavors, etc., and the resources to participate in society”

Purpose is defined as the reason for which something exists. To perceive one’s daily activities as having purpose contributes to our sense of self-worth and a belief in the meaningfulness of our existence. Purpose can be as sublime as a personal mission to end poverty and suffering or as seemingly mundane as suiting up for work and showing up for family. People who have experienced SUD encounter barriers to this dimension of wellness, sometimes because of criminal justice system entanglements or sometimes simply through the sometimes recovery-hostile nature of these environments. The following list presents some resources for overcoming these barriers and finding support.

Family Reunification

Family caretaking is a fundamental component of the *purpose* dimension of wellness, but the stigma surrounding drug use and the criminalization of drugs has led to family separation. Parenting people who are in recovery face barriers to family reunification, often with little support. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people experiencing SUDs are considered to have a disability. According to [recent guidance from the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division](#), the ADA protects people in treatment or in recovery from SUD

“from discrimination by social services agencies; child welfare agencies; courts; prisons and jails; medical facilities, including hospitals, doctors’ offices, and skilled nursing facilities; homeless shelters; and schools, colleges, and universities” (p. 1). The guidance notes that people taking medications for opioid use disorder are protected by the law, an important distinction for pregnant and parenting people who face discriminatory barriers to reunification. The ADA does not cover people who are currently using illegal drugs or overusing prescribed, controlled substances. The document provides guidance on filing a complaint when people feel they have been discriminated against because of their treatment or recovery from SUD.

Collegiate Recovery Programs

Closing in on 50 years of existence, collegiate recovery programs (CRPs) offer addiction recovery support services to students on college campuses – historically recovery hostile environments. Over 140 CRPs make up [Association of Recovery in Higher Education \(ARHE\)](#) membership. ARHE maintains a public-facing directory of its membership and encourages people to contact college and university members directly if interested in their programs.

Recovery Friendly Workplaces

[Recovery Friendly Workplaces \(RFW\)](#) are businesses that create policies and procedures promote cultures that support employees seeking recovery from SUD. Many states and communities now

offer employers free technical assistance aimed at developing Recovery Friendly Workplace policies and training for managers and employees.

Employee Resource Groups

Due to the stigma surrounding SUD and a culture of anonymity among people in recovery, people impacted by substance use can remain isolated from one another in the workspace. We all work with someone in recovery, though we might not know that they are in recovery. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary affinity groups employees may join in their workplace to connect with fellow employees with similar experiences. Historically marginalized employees gather to offer mutual support and to serve as an organizational resource in support of a diverse and inclusive workspace. Not all employers have ERGs, but the [Association of ERGs & Councils](#) “provides Employee Resource Groups with the tools, skills, and capabilities to excel... from start up to ongoing progression as a strategic business and organizational resource for change.”

Volunteering

Contributing to the common good in a structured way while connecting with like-minded peers is a recipe for purpose-filled days that support a life in recovery. Volunteers can find opportunities that align with their interests and passions to add deeper meaning to their efforts. Because many people in recovery from SUD live with internalized stigma or shame, they may be vulnerable to higher expectations of self or exploitation by others when it comes to service. People in recovery can be

mindful to strike balance between work, home, and volunteering to minimize the risk of burnout and benefit from the experience.

- [Find Volunteer Opportunities | VolunteerMatch](#)
- [How to Volunteer | American Red Cross](#)
- [Find a Volunteer Opportunity | United Way](#)
- [The Many Meanings of ‘Volunteer’ | Volunteers of America](#)

Advocacy & Education

Helping more people to find sustained recovery by addressing the stigma surrounding SUD and eliminating discriminatory barriers to freedom and wellness is a deeply purposeful activity for many in recovery. National organizations help people leverage the power of their stories and lived experience expertise to make change on many levels.

[Faces & Voices of Recovery](#) is “dedicated to organizing and mobilizing the over 23 million Americans in recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, our families, friends and allies into recovery community organizations and networks, to promote the right and resources to recover through advocacy, education and demonstrating the power and proof of long-term recovery.”

The [Recovery Advocacy Project \(RAP\)](#) is a “network of people and organizations across the country advocating for addiction recovery policies. RAP is committed to giving people in recovery from all pathways, family members, and supporters of recovery the grassroots organizing tools to think and act locally.”