

# ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY

**Recovery  
Advocacy Toolkit**

MAKING OUR VOICES COUNT

**Recovery**

# INTRODUCTION

Recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs benefits everyone – families, friends, neighbors, and the person who gets into recovery. It is a reality for millions of Americans of all ages, ethnic backgrounds, and economic and social classes. We must accord dignity to people with addiction and recognize that there is no one path to recovery.

By involving everyone in your community in your advocacy and recovery celebrations, together we can help change public perceptions of recovery, promote effective public policy and demonstrate that recovery is a reality for millions of Americans. Events like rallies, runs, walks, sober social events or other activities can educate people in your community about long-term recovery, engage kids and families in community-wide events, and demonstrate the joy and new life that goes along with recovery.

You and other people in the recovery community are the experts when it comes to recovery. By encouraging others to talk with their friends, co-workers, and neighbors about what it means to be in recovery or help someone else get into recovery you are doing more than sharing your experience. You are changing how people think about addiction and the need to get help to others so that they can enjoy lives in recovery.

There are many ways that you and your organization can engage your community to put a face and a voice on recovery and take action.

**You can...** *Educate and organize citizens to take action to support **The Recovery Bill of Rights** and participate in the **Recovery Voices Count** campaign*

**You can...** *Invite the community and allies to sponsor and/or participate in events such as Rally for Recovery, Recovery Month, Public Policy Panels, or a Town Hall Meeting*

**You can...** *Raise awareness and mobilize support for new attitudes and policies*

**You can...** *Encourage and train people to speak out as a person in long-term recovery or as a family member*

As you engage people in your community, please refer to the “Talking about Recovery” document, found in the *Media Outreach* section of this toolkit, which provides training and information on ways that people can most effectively share their recovery stories.

Citizens are uniting and advocating using town hall meetings, public policy panels, house parties, media outreach, and special briefings to key policymakers to build a recovery advocacy constituency. We are learning from one another about new strategies and campaigns to get the word out about actions to support long-term recovery. One strategy is to reach out to new partners and involve them in our work.

## PARTNERS

**Involving the community, key organizations and leaders** will make your advocacy even more effective. These allies can help plan events and draw in new allies for recovery. Activities that focus on and involve **real people** will show that addiction and recovery affects **everyone**. Here are some suggestions for constituencies that you can involve:

- Educators
- Faith Community
- Community Coalitions
- Parents and Families
- Government [Public Officials]
- Criminal Justice Professionals
- Business Community
- Healthcare Professionals
- Media
- Addiction Treatment Providers

## EDUCATORS

Teachers have a unique opportunity to be a positive adult influence in the lives of students. They are also well-respected members in the community.

Students may be dealing with their own problems, have friends with alcohol or other drug problems, or be a child of someone with addiction. School can be a place for students to learn about ways to find the help they need and have a safe place to express their feelings. Teachers can organize a forum or assembly where students can discuss what's happening in their lives around alcohol and other drugs and learn about recovery resources and treatment options, such as help in a doctor's office, in-patient treatment programs, 12-step meetings, counseling, the faith community, etc. Please refer to the *Pathways to Recovery* section of the **Recovery Advocacy Toolkit** for more information.

### Action Steps:

- Organize programs and provide guidance for teachers and speakers for assemblies
  - To help students understand addiction and recovery
  - Living with family members with addiction
  - What it means to be in recovery as a young person
  - Make sure to keep school administrators and teachers informed about events or activities that students may want to participate in
  - Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to local schools [school nurses are a great place to start] and your board of education

## FAITH COMMUNITY

It is very common for people in recovery or seeking recovery to look to the faith community for spiritual leadership and guidance. Through congregational activities, the faith community can create awareness, educate the congregation and support recovery and the recovery community.

Often religious leaders may honor people in recovery as an example of their spiritual journey and their strength and commitment to their recovery path. The faith community offers tremendous resources and has partnered with many organizations in recovery activities or events.

In some communities, faith leaders and clergy have been holding "Recovery Weekends," where religious leaders of all denominations make recovery part of their services. Many of these weekends are held during *Recovery Month* in September. Sermons and homilies include discussions about the importance of early intervention, treatment, and recovery and how it can positively influence families and life in the community. Frequently the stories of families who belong to a parish, congregation, temple, or mosque are woven in. If appropriate, a person in recovery may be asked to tell their recovery story. Faith leaders can help their members better understand addiction and recovery and encourage parishioners to get help. For more information, contact Faith Partners at <http://rushcenter.org/faithapproach/faqs.aspx> or the National Association for Children of Alcoholic's Faith Initiative at [www.nacoa.org](http://www.nacoa.org).

### Action Steps:

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to faith-based organizations and houses of worship
- Invite faith organizations and faith leaders to attend your events such as town hall meetings and public policy panels or to be a speaker at an event
- Offer a workshop to faith-based organizations to educate the leaders about addiction and long-term recovery resources that are available in your area and through your organization
- Develop and share materials and information with clergy for use in sermons and events

## COMMUNITY COALITIONS

There are hundreds of community coalitions across the country, where local groups, organizations, and individuals come together to address issues of common concern. They consolidate human and financial resources and expertise to develop community-wide action plans to tackle these issues.

Joining in existing coalitions or building a new one in your community to support recovery can expand support for new attitudes and policies, making recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs a higher priority in your city or town. There are hundreds of anti-drug coalitions around the country and information on them can be found at [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org), the website of the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America. Faces & Voices of Recovery collaborated with CADCA and Join Together on a project involving HBO's *ADDICTION* documentary in 2007, forging new relationships between the organized recovery community and community coalitions. Many coalitions were founded by prevention advocates, an important constituency for building support for recovery. The Recovery Month Kit at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov) has very useful tips on Building Community Coalitions.

### Action Steps

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to the community coalition in your town
- Invite community coalition members to participate in your **Recovery Voices Count** events
- Invite coalition members to sponsor and participate in town hall meetings and other activities
- Encourage coalition members to think about recovery as a prevention strategy

## PARENTS AND FAMILIES

It is important to reach out to the families and loved ones of people seeking recovery – they often have questions and need answers and support to understand what's going on in their own lives and the lives of their loved one. The recovery process can be healing for the entire family, and it is important to have care that addresses the specific needs of the family for effective treatment and long-term recovery. Parents and loved ones can help motivate people to access treatment and celebrate their successes in recovery. When parents are well-informed about addiction to alcohol and other drugs and the many pathways to recovery, they can be powerful advocates for the services and support that their children need to recover. There are growing numbers of organizations of parents and family members who are mobilizing to support addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery. Some examples are A New PATH in California; Parent Support Groups in Massachusetts; MOMSTELL in Pennsylvania; and FASTER in Vermont. Far too many families have lost loved ones to addiction in our country. Some of these individuals have become important spokespeople for the need for changing policies in communities and are working tirelessly to provide help and support to others.

## GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Alcohol and drug problems are pervasive in every community, affecting everyone either directly or indirectly. Public officials need to be educated about the reality of recovery because it is the solution to an issue that is important to constituents. They also need to know that there are constituents who are in recovery and what it means to them and their families. By opening a dialogue with elected officials and their staffs, you can start working with them to make treatment and recovery support services available to people who need help to get well. Let them know that recovery happens every day in your city or town and that there are effective solutions for people still struggling.

### Action Steps

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to your local elected officials
- Invite them to participate in local **Recovery Voices Count** events
- Invite them to attend and speak at activities and events where they can meet people in the recovery community and hear their stories first-hand

- Provide government officials with local statistics on the costs of untreated addiction in your community and information on effective recovery and treatment resources for people to find help
- Encourage local government officials to monitor alcohol and other drug use; the health care and criminal justice costs of addiction; alcohol and drug-related deaths and other indicators of the impact of untreated addiction in your community
- Encourage public officials to support public policies that help people get help and remove discriminatory policies that are barriers to long-term recovery
- Encourage the establishment and support of Drug Court programs to reduce recidivism and provide an alternative to incarceration
- Encourage support for recovery community organizations, recovery housing, opportunities for safe and sober social activities, and other recovery-friendly policies
- Get to know the director of your state alcohol and drug agency and involve him or her in your activities

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROFESSIONALS

It is important to reach out to criminal justice and law enforcement professionals because they know firsthand that the vast majority of the people in the criminal justice system are there because of alcohol and drug problems, including addiction. When law enforcement professionals talk about the need for more opportunities for people to recover from addiction or support alternatives to incarceration for people with non-violent, drug-involved offenses, policymakers and the public listen. Providing effective treatment and recovery support for people while they are incarcerated can help reduce recidivism, make society safer, save taxpayer dollars, and improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

### Action Steps

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to law enforcement officials
- Encourage them to participate in local **Recovery Voices Count** events and other activities
- Hold educational activities in local jails, courts, and law enforcement facilities
- Provide officials with information about how to screen inmates for potential alcohol and drug problems so they can get counseling, treatment, or join mutual support groups while incarcerated

## BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Business community leaders are a valuable resource to engage in your activities. Many have participated in recovery activities by sharing their personal recovery stories or those of employees or loved ones. Others have adopted recovery-friendly hiring and employment policies. They also are able to provide professional expertise or resources for planning and carrying out events.

### Action Steps

- Identify a recovery-friendly business person and ask them to partner in hosting your event. Ask them to involve their employees and business associates when appropriate
- Request professional services for an announcement or an event to improve awareness in the community about addiction and recovery and to expand recovery resources in your community
- Ask them to display **The Recovery Bill of Rights** and other informational materials in the workplace

## HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

It is important to reach out to healthcare professionals like nurses and doctors, because they have experience working with patients, many of whom may need help for addiction or addiction-related problems. Healthcare professionals can educate and provide authority and expertise to advance prevention and recovery from addiction.

### Action Steps

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to your local hospitals, clinics, community health centers, and physicians' offices.
- Provide information about local treatment agencies and recovery resources so that they can make referrals if needed
- Encourage them to participate in a local **Recovery Voices Count** event and other activities
- Ask them to serve on public policy panels or speak at and attend town hall meetings

## MEDIA

In addition to providing news coverage of your events and activities, local media outlets can be great partners in your activities. Many newspapers, radio, and TV stations and other media companies sponsor community events with financial and in-kind support. Frequently, local news anchors, and radio announcers are well known in the community. They make excellent moderators and hosts for panels, rallies and other events. Many recovery community organizations work with news anchors and other local media people who are in recovery and are willing to speak publicly about their recovery and moderate events. Media sponsorship of your event may give it more credibility and show local support.

### Action Steps:

- Invite local media outlets to sponsor your events
- Invite local reporters and news anchors to serve as moderators and hosts of your events
- Hold informational meetings with reporters about addiction recovery issues and let them know that you can serve as resources for background information about addiction and recovery and connect with them with individuals in the recovery community to provide "human interest" for stories about recovery in your community
- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to your local media outlets
- Encourage local media outlets to report on local **Recovery Voices Count** events and other activities involving the community

## ADDICTION TREATMENT PROVIDERS

Addiction treatment is provided in a wide variety of settings – at publicly and privately-funded treatment centers, doctor's offices and in clinics. Many of these treatment centers also have alumni associations, which family members and individuals in recovery belong to and participate in. Many treatment center employees are themselves in recovery from addiction.

### Action Steps:

- Send a copy of **The Recovery Bill of Rights** to your local addiction treatment providers, doctors and clinic directors
- Invite treatment providers, doctors and clinic directors to sponsor and participate in a local **Recovery Voices Count** event and other activities such as providing opportunities for clients to register to vote
- Encourage them to invite their clients and patients and their families to attend events

For more information about possible partners, visit the Recovery Month web site at [www.recoverymonth.gov](http://www.recoverymonth.gov)