

Addiction: Just the Facts

Misconceptions abound regarding substance abuse. Some believe addiction is a disease, while others view it as a “moral weakness.” Separating “fact” from “fiction” can be time-consuming, so here are the facts, provided by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services:

- **Addiction is a disease, not a “moral” issue.** Like many chronic and progressive diseases, addiction has recognized symptoms, and is influenced by both genetic and environmental factors.
- **Unlike social drinkers, addicts/alcoholics are unable to stop drinking or using on their own.** The defining characteristic of addiction is a compulsion to continue drinking or using despite adverse consequences (such as loss of a job). Quitting, for these people, is not a matter of willpower.
- **People who begin drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcoholism than those who begin at age 21.**
- **Approximately 73 percent of all illegal drug users in the United States are employed.**
- **Alcohol, not methamphetamine, is Oklahoma’s most abused drug.** Oklahomans need treatment for alcohol at a rate 7.5 times greater than that for other drugs.
- **Substance abuse costs Oklahoma nearly \$7 billion per year** in lost productivity and cash expenditures (health care, public safety, social services and property loss).
- **Substance abuse is a major public health problem,** contributing to 85 percent of all homicides, 80 percent of all prison incarcerations, 75 percent of all divorces, 65 percent of all child abuse cases, 55 percent of domestic assaults, and half of all traffic fatalities and accidental deaths.
- **Substance abuse is a primary factor in welfare dependence,** the rising rate of illegitimacy, workplace injuries and other problems that cost Oklahoma taxpayers some \$1.3 billion a year.

