Center for Community Engagement at Chestnut Health Systems

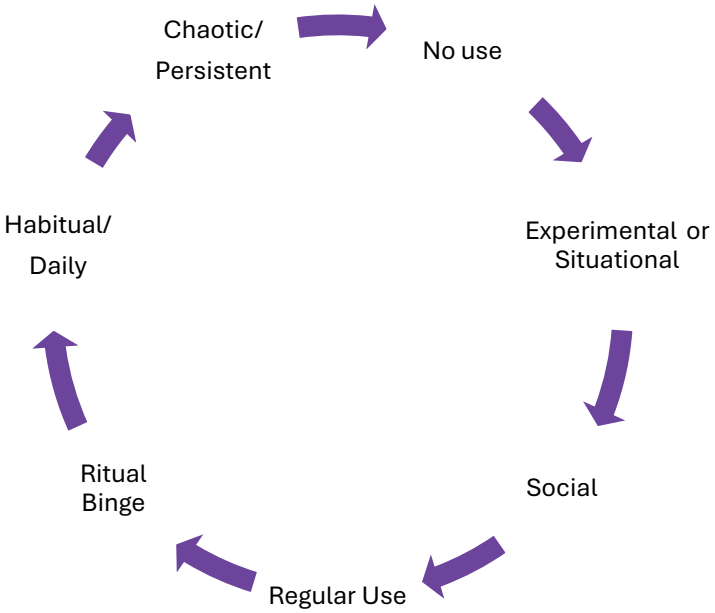
SUD Treatment

Quick Reference Guide

An overview of substance use disorder treatment basics, screening, levels of support, and effective care principles.

Core Concept

Substance use occurs on a continuum:



Addiction affects each person differently because brain chemistry, life experiences, health conditions, and environment may vary.

Key Reminder: A substance use disorder is treatable, but stigma, limited access, cost, and fear of judgement can prevent people from seeking help.

Screenings, Assessment, and Treatment

A comprehensive assessment helps determine the most appropriate level of care. Screening is a critical first step in figuring out how best to help someone. This guides the service provider and client on what to do next. It may lead to an assessment and/or other screenings that need to occur. In general, screenings and assessments do the following:

- Gauges severity of substance use and identifies next steps.
- May identify physical health, mental health, and frequency-of-use concerns.
- Supports early intervention before substance use becomes more chronic or harmful.
- Uses DSM-5 criteria: at least 2 symptoms within a 12-month period may indicate a mild to severe substance use disorder.

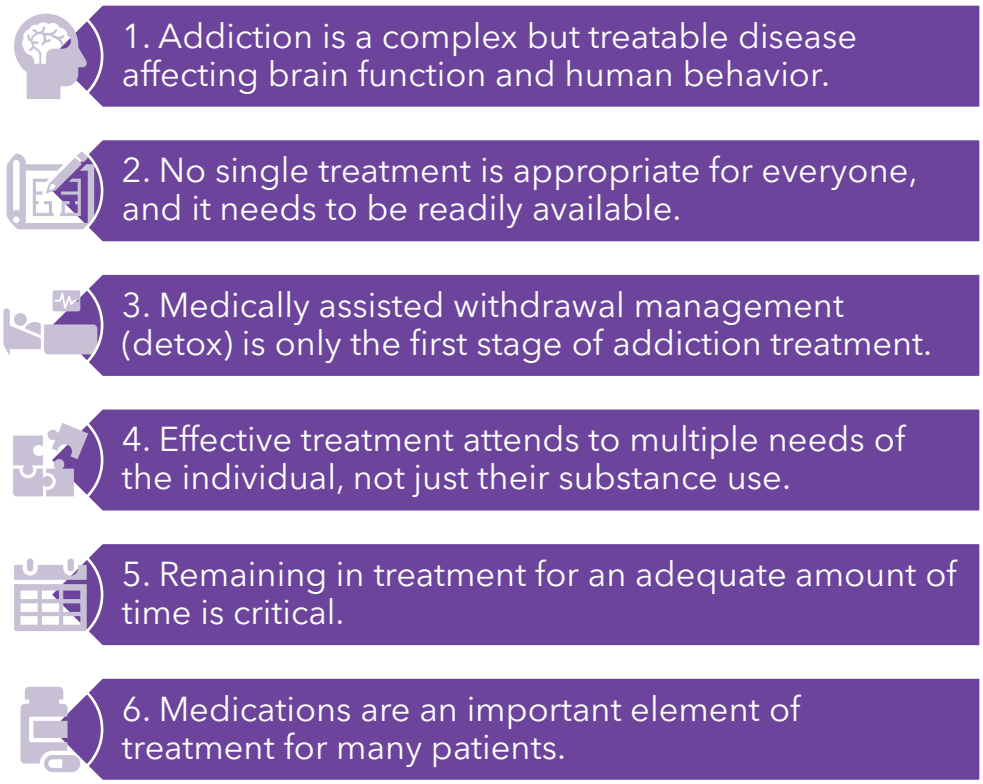
Treatment Pathways

Need Identified	**Possible Support**
Early or risky use	Screening, brief intervention, education, prevention, harm reduction
Withdrawal or medical risk	Medically managed withdrawal management; continued treatment after detox
Ongoing SUD treatment needs	Outpatient, intensive outpatient, residential, or inpatient services as appropriate
Co-occurring needs	Integrated care for mental health, medical, dental, trauma, social, vocational, or legal needs
Long-term recovery support	Aftercare, medications when appropriate, therapy, meetings, peer support, and relapse-response planning

Effective Treatment Principles

- **No single treatment works for everyone.** Care should match the person's needs, culture, age, goals, and circumstances.
- **Treatment must be readily available**. Delays can prevent people from engaging when they are ready.
- **Withdrawal Management is only the first step.** Medical and therapeutic support should continue beyond withdrawal management.
- **Treat the whole person.** Effective care addresses substance use plus mental health, medical, dental, trauma, social, vocational, and legal needs.
- **Time in treatment matters.** Ongoing care and adequate duration improve outcomes.
- **Evidence-based medications can help.** Medication, counseling, behavioral therapies, and recovery supports often work best together.
- **Treatment plans should change as needs change.** Setbacks or recurrent use patterns mean the plan should be revised—not that treatment failed.

Principles of Effective Treatment



Remember that recovery is an ongoing process. People may experience progress, setbacks, and changes in treatment needs over time. Healing is rarely a straight line. Recovery is a journey that shifts over time marked by personal growth.

How to Reduce Barriers

- Use nonjudgmental, person-first language.
- Normalize screening and help-seeking.
- Offer education, prevention, and risk reduction tools.
- Connect people to treatment options that fit their needs and level of readiness.
- Emphasize that recovery can include progress, setbacks, revised plans, and continued support.

Bottom line: SUD treatment is most effective when it is individualized, accessible, continuous, evidence-informed, and focused on the whole person—not just substance use.

Remember: People don't have to be "ready for treatment" to deserve compassion, support, education, and risk reduction. Every positive interaction can move someone one step closer to recovery.

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