

Substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recognizing concerns and making a change

Brandon G. Bergman, PhD
Harvard Medical School
Recovery Research Institute
Massachusetts General Hospital
March 14, 2022



Acknowledgment

Presented in 2022 by the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) Network.

This presentation was prepared for the New England Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) Network under a cooperative agreement from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). All material appearing in this publication, except that taken directly from copyrighted sources, is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA or the authors. Citation of the source is appreciated. Do not reproduce or distribute this publication for a fee without specific, written authorization from New England MHTTC. For more information on obtaining copies of this publication, email us at newengland@mhttcnetwork.org.

At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The opinions expressed herein are the view of TTC Network and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this document is intended or should be inferred.

This work is supported by grants #1H79SM081775 from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Presented 2022

The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

Communication and Interaction

- Post questions in the chat; I'll dedicate a few minutes to answer them between sections
- Time at the end for more in-depth discussion
- Contact info on the last slide. Email if:
 - You have a question or comment but would prefer not to disclose in public forum
 - Question or comment comes to mind after the talk
 - Any other reason
- www.recoveryanswers.org

Disclosures

- Dr. Bergman's work is funded by the following organizations and entities
 - NIAAA (K23AA0025707)
 - Recovery Research Institute
- Dr. Bergman has served as a consultant or co-investigator on grants that are submitting and pending, or funded by, the following organizations and entities
 - NIAAA (PI: Kelly)
 - NIDA (PIs: Hoepfner/Kelly; SoberGrid)
- Dr. Bergman is a member of the board of directors or advisory board for the following organizations and entities
 - Unity Recovery, a Recovery Community Organization
- Dr. Bergman has no direct financial stake in any of these organizations or entities



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Objectives

- 1) Highlight patterns of substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2) Discuss strategies to recognize substance use concerns
- 3) Review approaches to making changes in substance use and related behaviors





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Objectives

- 1) Highlight patterns of substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2) Discuss strategies to recognize substance use concerns
- 3) Review approaches to making changes in substance use and related behaviors





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

COVID-19 and Substance Use: Why might they be related?

- Stress (e.g., Sinha 2008)
- Isolation (e.g., Christie 2021) and Loneliness (e.g., Ingram 2020)
- Reduced access to fun, coping
 - Stress and Coping Theory
- Time (e.g., during required “social distancing” earlier in pandemic)





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Definitions for Our Discussion

- Substance use = alcohol and other drug use
 - Tobacco/nicotine (e.g., cigs, vaping, etc.)
- Hazardous, harmful, excessive \neq Addiction
- Health behavior *change*
 - Substance use, nutrition, exercise, sleep, etc.





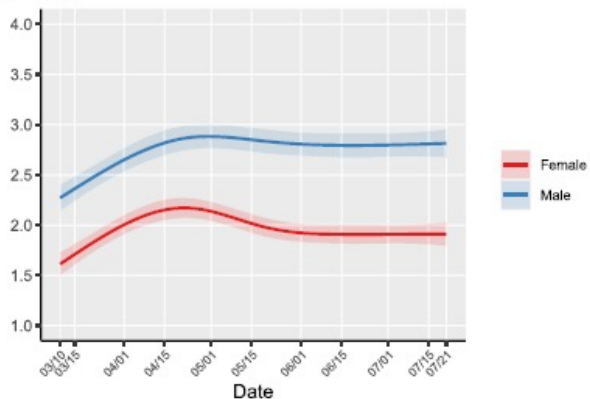
MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

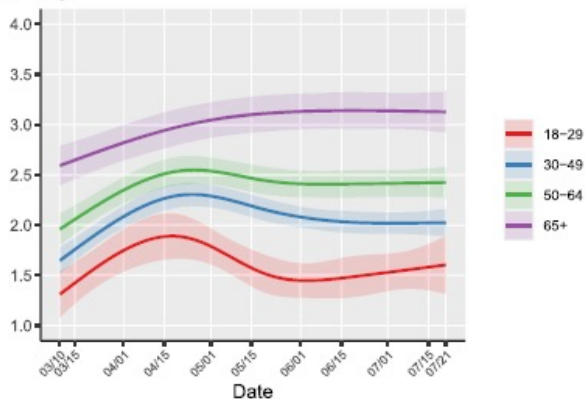
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Substance use during COVID-19

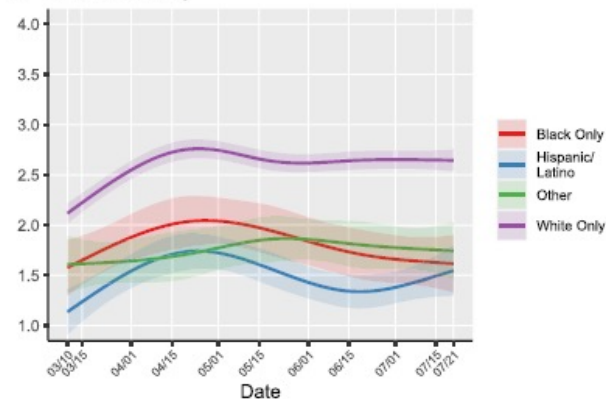
a Sex



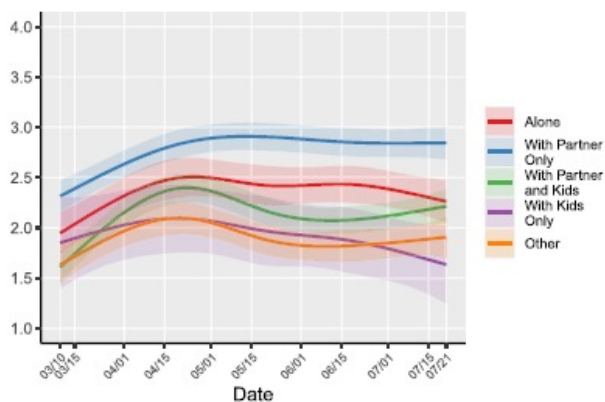
b Age



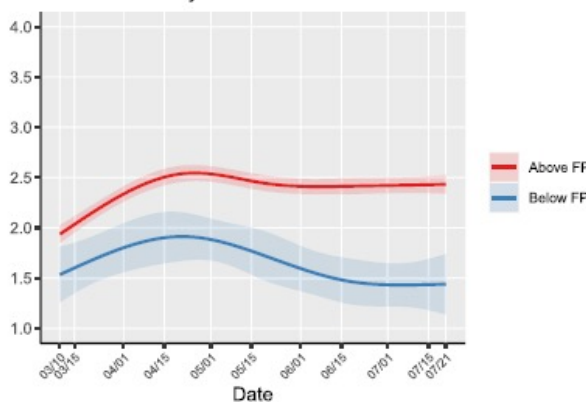
c Race/Ethnicity



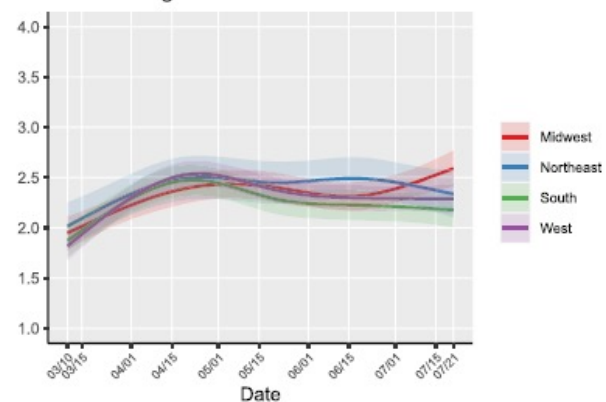
d Household Structure



e Federal Poverty Line



f Census Region



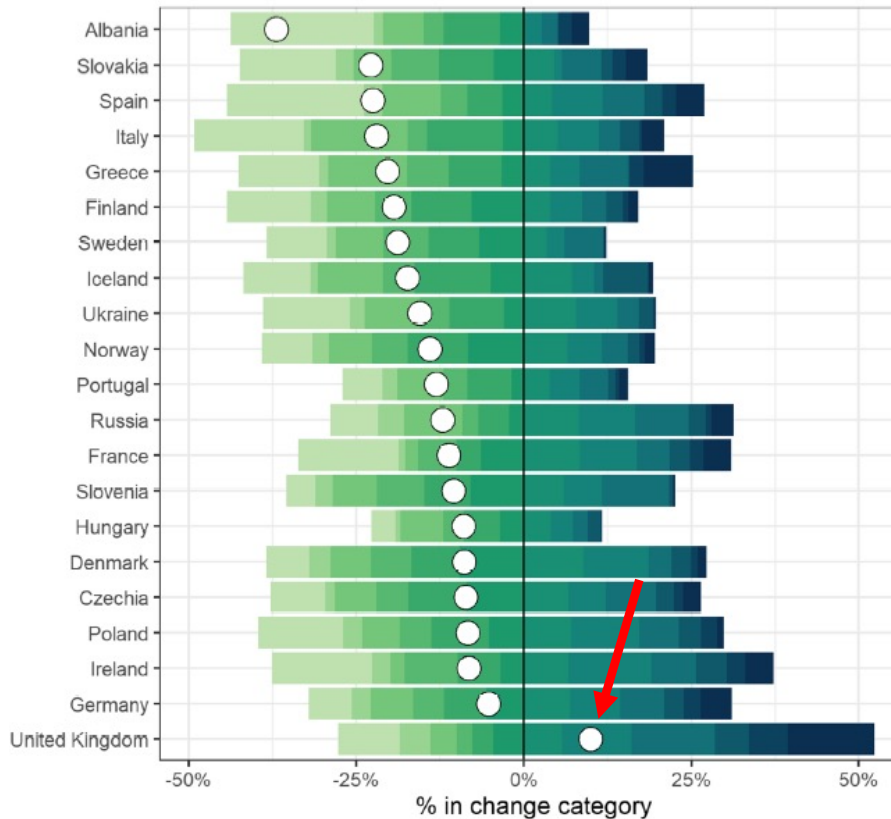


MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Substance use during COVID-19



“Driven by decline in frequency of heavy drinking”

Drinking days, drinks per drinking day, ‘heavy’ drinking (6+ drinks/occasion)
Convenience sample; 21 European countries
Source: Kilian et al., 2021, Addiction



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Risk for healthcare workers

- COVID Stress Syndrome (Taylor 2020; McKay & Asmundson, 2020)
 - Infection fear; financial worry; xenophobia; traumatic stress; checking
 - Behavioral Immune System (Schaller & Park, 2011)
- Financial, social, environmental stress → Substance use risk (McKay & Asmundson, 2020)
 - Women and those with lower levels of education
- One in four with harmful/hazardous drinking in Brazil ICU July – October 2020 (Pestana et al. 2022)

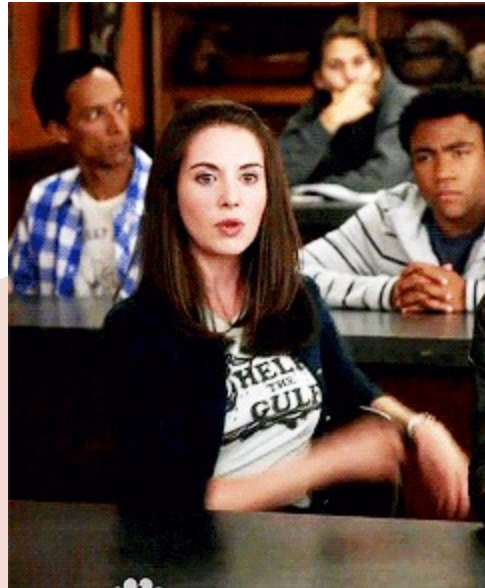




MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Let's pause here to answer any questions.





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Objectives

- 1) Highlight patterns of substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2) Discuss strategies to recognize substance use concerns
- 3) Review approaches to making changes in substance use and related behaviors

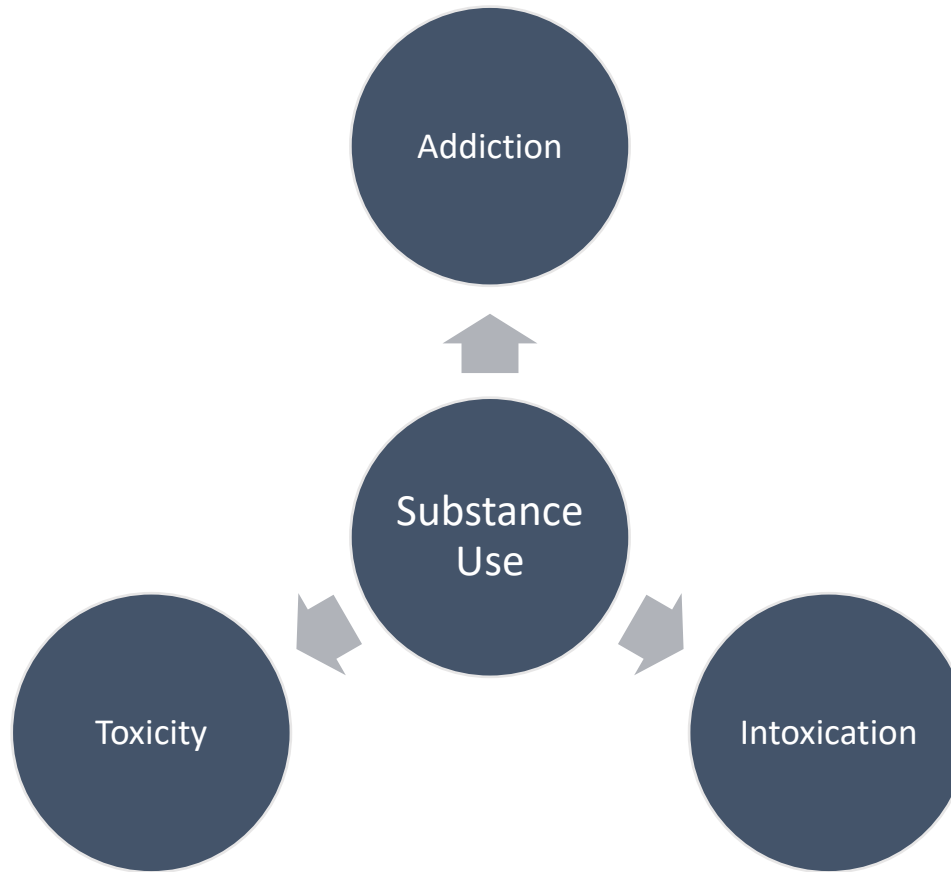




MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Substance use can impact daily life in different ways





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Substance Use Disorder

Impairment of Control

- Unsuccessful attempts to quit/cut down*
- Larger amounts/longer time
- Excessive time
- Craving (ok for remission)

Social Impairment

- Activities given up
- Social/interpersonal difficulties
- Major roles neglected

Risky Use

- Situations where it is dangerous (e.g., operating a car)
- Exacerbates physical/mental health problems

Biophysiological Markers

- Tolerance
- Withdrawal

“Clinically significant impairment or distress”

Past 12 months

Mild = 2-3

Moderate = 4-5

Severe = 6+



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

NIAAA “Low-Risk” Drinking

A Standard Drink



**12 fl oz
Hard Seltzer**
(~5% alc/vol)



**12 fl oz
Standard beer**
(~5% alc/vol)



**8-9 fl oz
High % ABV Beer**
(~7% alc/vol)



**5 fl oz
Wine/Champagne**
(~13% alc/vol)



**1 shot (1.5 fl oz) in
Mixed Drink**
(~40% alc/vol)



**1.5 fl oz
80 proof shot**
(~40% alc/vol)

Men: Max of 14 per week, 4 per day
Women: Max of 7 per week, 3 per day

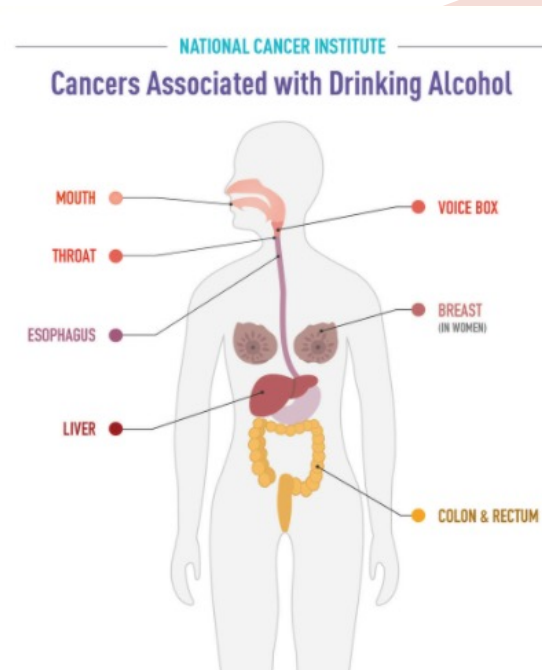
SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Ex: Alcohol and Cancer Risk

There is a strong scientific consensus that alcohol drinking can cause several types of cancer (1, 2). In its [Report on Carcinogens](#), the National Toxicology Program of the US Department of Health and Human Services lists consumption of alcoholic beverages as a known human [carcinogen](#).

The evidence indicates that the more alcohol a person drinks—particularly the more alcohol a person drinks regularly over time—the higher his or her risk of developing an alcohol-associated cancer. Even those who have no more than one drink per day and binge drinkers (those who consume 4 or more drinks for women and 5 or more drinks for men in one sitting) have a modestly increased risk of some cancers (3-7). Based on data from 2009, an estimated 3.5% of cancer deaths in the United States (about 19,500 deaths) were alcohol related (8).



From <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/alcohol/alcohol-fact-sheet>



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Demonstration: Is substance use interfering with your life?

<https://nida.nih.gov/taps>

TAPS

Tobacco, Alcohol, Prescription medication, and other Substance use Tool

The Tobacco, Alcohol, Prescription medication, and other Substance use (TAPS) Tool consists of a combined screening component (TAPS-1) followed by a brief assessment (TAPS-2) for those who screen positive.

This tool:

- Combines screening and brief assessment for commonly used substances, eliminating the need for multiple screening and lengthy assessment tools
- Provides a two stage brief assessment adapted from the NIDA quick screen and brief assessment (adapted ASSIST-lite)
- May be either self-administered directly by the patient or as an interview by a health professional
- Uses an electronic format (available here as an online tool)
- Uses a screening component to ask about frequency of substance use in the past 12 months
- Facilitates a brief assessment of past 3 months problem use to the patient

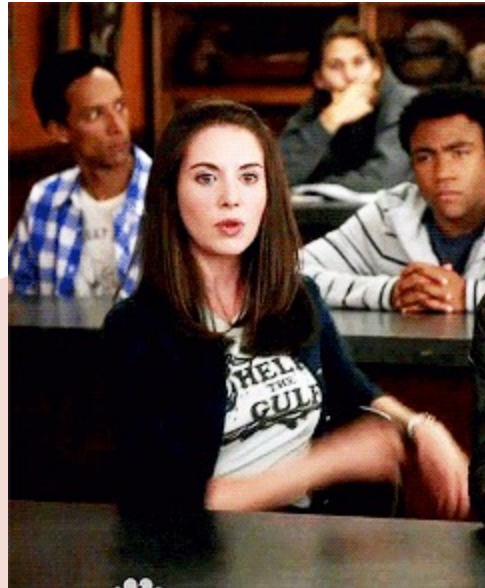




MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Let's pause again before we talk about ways to make a change.





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Objectives

- 1) Highlight patterns of substance use during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2) Discuss strategies to recognize substance use concerns
- 3) Review approaches to making changes in substance use and related behaviors





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Professional Treatment

intensity

LEVELS OF CLINICAL CARE



LEVEL 4

Medically Managed Intensive Inpatient Services

A professionally delivered treatment modality that provides 24-hour nursing care and medical staff, with daily physician care and counseling available for patients suffering from severe instability and imminent danger.

LEVEL 3

Clinically Managed Low to High Intensity Residential Services

A professionally delivered treatment modality that provides 24 hour living support and programmatic structure with available trained personnel, clinical and co-occurring disorder services, and stabilization for patients in imminent danger.

LEVEL 2

Intensive Outpatient & Partial Hospitalization

A professionally delivered treatment modality that provides daily to weekly attendance at a clinic or facility, typically requiring 9 to 20 or more hours of service/week, allowing the patient to return home or to other living arrangements during non-treatment hours.

LEVEL 1

Outpatient Services

A professionally delivered treatment modality that provides daily to weekly attendance at a clinic or facility, typically less than 9 hours of service/week for adults, or less than 6 hours a week for adolescents, allowing the patient to return home or to other living arrangements during non-treatment hours.

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

[SAMHSA Home](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Search SAMHSA.gov

Search

[Home](#)

[About](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Locator Map](#)

[State Agencies](#)

[Widgets](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

Home



Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator

Welcome to the Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator, a confidential and anonymous source of information for persons seeking treatment facilities in the United States or U.S. Territories for substance use/addiction and/or mental health problems.

PLEASE NOTE: Your personal information and the search criteria you enter into the Locator is secure and anonymous. SAMHSA does not collect or maintain any information you provide.

Find treatment facilities confidentially and anonymously.

Enter an Address, City, or ZIP code

Search facilities

Get Help

FindTreatment.gov

Millions of Americans have a substance use disorder. Find a treatment facility near you.

Suicide prevention lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Free and confidential support for people in distress, 24/7.

National Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Treatment referral and information, 24/7.

Disaster Distress Helpline

1-800-985-5990

Immediate crisis counseling related to disasters, 24/7.



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Demonstration: Finding a Therapist

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Professional Treatment (con'd)

- **11 indicators of treatment quality**

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/resource/effective-addiction-treatment-what-makes-a-good-addiction-treatment-program/>

Assessment; integrated mental health and substance use treatment; community connections and continuing care; “good vibe” from the provider or program; empirically-supported approaches, etc.

- **10 recommended questions**

<https://alcohol.treatment.niaaa.nih.gov/how-to-find-alcohol-treatment>

Availability; costs and insurance; credentials; treatment approach, etc. (10)

- Employee assistance programs (EAP) can be helpful
- If you are **very** concerned about your use, need structure and oversight, licensing boards can offer help (e.g., physician’s health programs)
 - Note: They will likely make your professional license contingent on adhering to program





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Recovery support groups and other free community-based services

- 12-step groups; most common and caters more to those with severe substance use disorder
- Other recovery support groups, e.g., SMART Recovery (<https://www.smartrecovery.org/>)
- Recovery community centers
 - Community “hub” to promote recovery capital (Kelly 2020)
 - Social events, recovery support groups, recovery coaching, employment/education assistance, medication, overdose reversal supplies and training (e.g., naloxone)



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Online recovery support

- Intherooms.com; Sober Grid
- Reddit (e.g., r/StopDrinking)
 - Posts associated with group therapy factors (e.g., imparting information, altruism, instillation of hope)
 - Very few potentially harmful posts
- Advantages
 - Low threshold
 - Convenient and accessible
 - Total anonymity is possible w/r/t other participants
- Disadvantages
 - Little is known empirically about effects of participation
 - Digital footprint



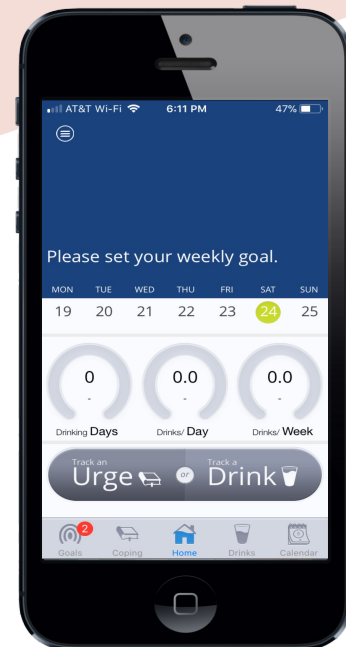


MHTTC

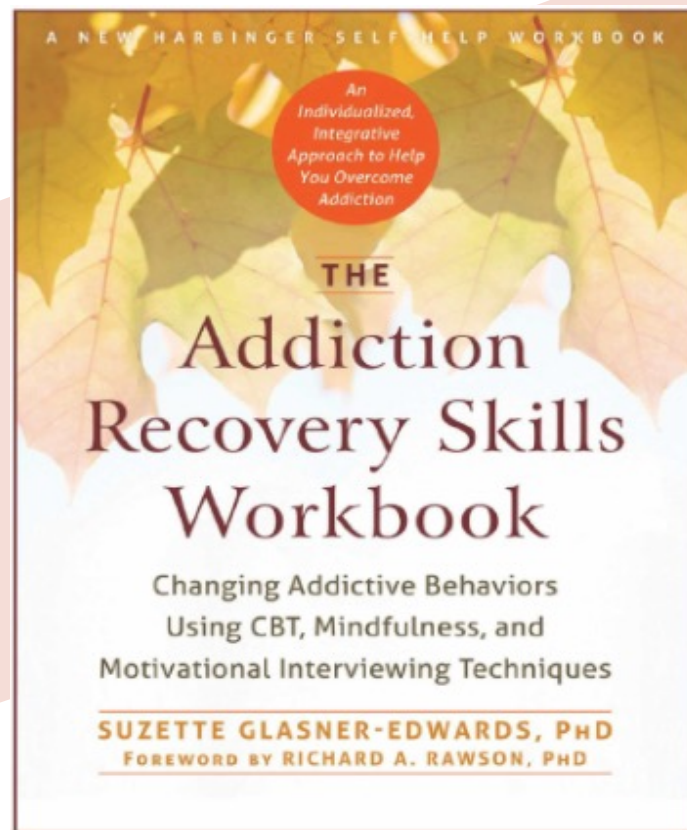
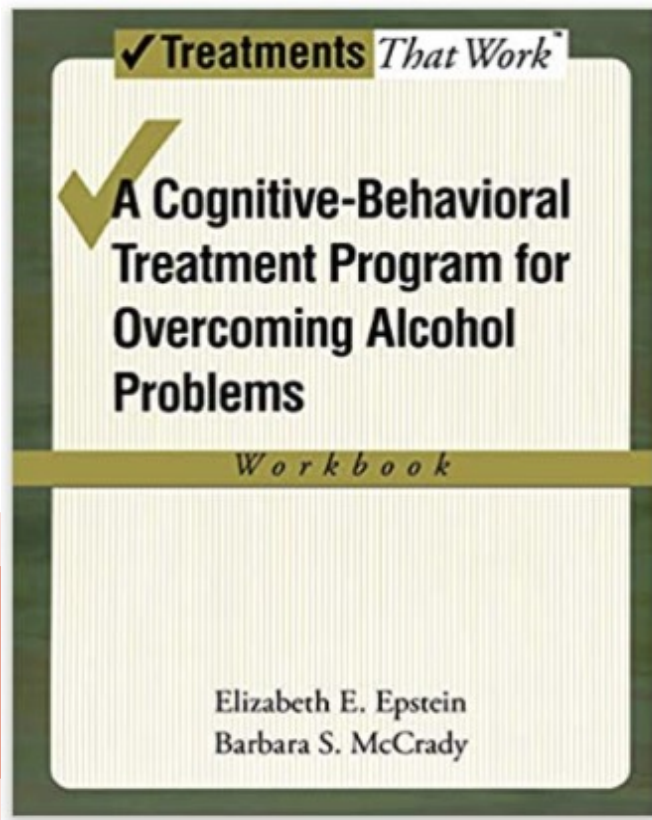
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Self-management

- “Independent study”
- Includes, not limited to tech-based approaches
- 60% downloaded an app to track their health (Krebs & Duncan 2015); 60% interested in apps to communicate with doctors 10% use health apps to achieve a health-related goal (Carroll 2017)
- Downsides to “apps”
 - Those vetted empirically may have “clinical gatekeepers”
 - Freely accessible ones may not offer empirically-supported strategies (Hoepfner 2017)
 - They can be transient – difficult to sustain involvement over time
- Recommendation: Know Your Source
 - Saying When by Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), for alcohol
 - Text2Quit, by the National Cancer Institute, for smoking



Self-management: Workbooks





MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Self-management: “Finding healthier ways to meet your needs”

FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Antecedents (Triggers, Thoughts, Feelings)	Behavior (Substance Use)	Positive Consequences	Negative Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-after work-stressed-upset that kids won't calm down-etc. <p>↑</p> <p>ways to respond to these</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-6 drinks with dinner and after kids went to bed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-de-stress-enjoyed watching show on Netflix-headache went away <p>↑</p> <p>to get these</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-partner upset/felt I ignored them-woke up 'in a fog'-doctor told me I need to cut back on my drinking <p>↑</p> <p>without leading to these</p>



Contact
Brandon Bergman
bgbergman@mgh.harvard.edu
@brandongbergman

RECOVERYANSWERS.ORG

RECOVERY RESEARCH INSTITUTE



SIGN UP FOR THE
FREE MONTHLY RECOVERY BULLETIN



@RECOVERYANSWERS



RECOVERY
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

RECOVERYANSWERS.ORG



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

The purpose of the MHTTC Network is technology transfer - disseminating and implementing evidence-based practices for mental disorders into the field.

Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the MHTTC Network includes 10 Regional Centers, a National American Indian and Alaska Native Center, a National Hispanic and Latino Center, and a Network Coordinating Office.

Our collaborative network supports resource development and dissemination, training and technical assistance, and workforce development for the mental health field. We work with systems, organizations, and treatment practitioners involved in the delivery of mental health services to strengthen their capacity to deliver effective evidence-based practices to individuals. Our services cover the full continuum spanning mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery support.

CONNECT WITH US



MHTTCnetwork.org



[Sign-Up for Newsletter](#)



[MHTTC News](#)



MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Thanks for your time. Questions and comments?

