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Research and News Worth Repeating

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Substance Use

Medicare's Discriminatory Coverage Policies For Substance Use Disorders

HealthAffairs Blog – June 22, 2021

Medicare covered about 62 million lives in 2020 although it falls far behind the coverage standards of most private and employer-based insurers and Medicaid plans when it comes to substance use disorder (SUD) services. Medicare essentially covers the least and most intensive services for substance use disorder treatment—office-based outpatient counseling and inpatient hospitalizations—, leaving beneficiaries who need intermediate levels of care without the services they need to recover. This antiquated and discriminatory financing system imposes tremendous burden on beneficiaries and the health care system. There are major consequences associated with the failure to cover intermediate levels of SUD care. One of the consequences is the lack of access within the community and workforce shortages for SUD treatment.

<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20210616.166523/full/>

Sociologist studies the impact of substance use on college graduation

UTSA Today – June 21, 2021

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, earning a college degree is one way to achieve social mobility, especially for someone from a lower socioeconomic background. However, there are barriers that can hinder a student's path to complete a degree such as substance use. Raymond Swisher, professor and chair of the Department of Sociology at University of Texas at San Antonio, examined the link between the college party subculture and its negative impact on graduation rates among first-generation students. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, Swisher examined predictors of substance use among college students and its consequences for subsequent graduation with a four-year degree. The study revealed that a student's socioeconomic background can protect against the consequences of substance use. Recent qualitative research suggests that substance use may be particularly detrimental for first-generation students. As the first in their family to earn a college degree, the path to graduation is often made more difficult by circumstances such as working long hours and living with parents, as well as an unfamiliar college environment. Swisher's research showed that continuing-generation students (those whose parents also have college degrees) are more likely to engage in substance use—most notably binge drinking and marijuana use—than first-generation students.

<https://www.utsa.edu/today/2021/06/story/substance-use-impact-college-graduation.html>

AMA calls for access to substance use disorder treatment in prisons, jails

AMA Press Releases – June 15, 2021

As early data indicates the COVID-19 pandemic has fueled the nation's drug overdose death rates, a Special Meeting of the American Medical Association (AMA) House of Delegates adopted policy strengthening efforts to increase access to evidence-based medical treatment for justice-involved individuals. Specifically, the policy expands and updates the AMA's longstanding recommendations to require medication treatment for opioid use disorder (OUD) as the standard of care for patients in jail and prison settings, including patients who are pregnant, postpartum, or parenting. The updated policy also reiterates the need for screening upon jail and prison entry and post-incarceration treatment for mental health and substance use disorders. It also builds on AMA advocacy in the courts and state legislatures to increase access to evidence-based care for justice-involved individuals.

<https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-calls-access-substance-use-disorder-treatment-prisons-jails>

Addiction treatment had failed. Could brain surgery save him?

The Washington Post – June 18, 2021

Virginia resident Gerod Buckhalter suffered from nearly two-decades of addiction experiencing overdoses, rehabs and relapses, homelessness, dead friends, and ruined lives. He knew he had to do something, else he would fall victim to the drug epidemic that has claimed nearly 850,000 others. Buckhalter underwent an experimental surgery where cut two nickel-size holes were cut in his skull and metal-tipped electrodes were inserted into his brain. He has not used a drug since the surgery, doctors are surprised by the successful outcome. The procedure has previously been used to treat Parkinson's disease, epilepsy and several other intractable conditions, but had not been attempted for drug addiction. The device, known as a deep brain stimulator, also is recording the electrical activity in Buckhalter's brain — another innovation that researchers hope will help locate a biomarker for addiction and allow earlier intervention with other people. Buckhalter still requires anti-drug medication, counseling and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. He still experiences cravings, depression and the anxiety that drove his drug use. He is only now beginning to rebuild the promising life that drugs crushed when he was barely old enough to drive. Currently, Buckhalter is the only individual in the United States to ever have substance use disorder relieved by deep brain stimulation.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/06/18/deep-brain-stimulation-addiction/>

Associations between parental alcohol problems in childhood and adversities during childhood and later adulthood: a cross-sectional study of 28047 adults from the general population

Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, Treatment, and Policy – June 7, 2021

Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are related to adverse physical and mental health outcomes. However, few larger studies based on a general population sample with age groups ranging from young adults to elderly have investigated whether parental alcohol problems increase the risk of offspring subjective reports of ACE both during childhood and current adult adversities. The purpose of this study was to examine the associations between parental alcohol problems and adversities during childhood and later in adulthood. Overall, the study found that parental alcohol problems increased the risk of offspring experiencing adversities during both childhood and adulthood. Providing supportive services to these children and their families and addressing this issue as part of treatment is important to prevent alcohol related harm.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00384-9#citeas>

Tailoring services in opioid treatment programs for patients involved in America's criminal justice system: national associations and variation by state and Medicaid expansion status

Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, Treatment, and Policy – June 19, 2021

Opioid treatment programs (OTPs) are the primary source of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for many individuals with opioid use disorder, including poor and uninsured patients and those involved in the criminal justice (CJ) system. Substance use treatment services that are tailored to the unique needs of patients often produce better outcomes, but little national research has addressed characteristics associated with whether OTPs offer services specifically tailored to community members involved in the CJ system. Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act has broadly strengthened MAT services, but the role of expansion in supporting MAT services that are specifically tailored towards CJ-involved populations remains unknown. Moreover, it is unknown whether the availability of tailored services varies between Medicaid expansion states. The findings of this study reiterate the role of Medicaid in promoting the adoption of comprehensive OTP services for CJ-involved populations. However, the proportion of OTPs that offered tailored services for CJ-involved clients was relatively low, pointing to the need to continually strengthen Medicaid services and coverage.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00388-5>

Gender disparities in opioid treatment progress in methadone versus counseling

Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, Treatment, and Policy – June 23, 2021

In the United States, the high dropout rate (75%) in opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment among women and racial/ethnic minorities calls for understanding factors that contribute to making progress in treatment. Whereas counseling and medication for OUD (MOUD, e.g. methadone, buprenorphine, naltrexone) is considered the gold standard of care in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment, many individuals with OUD receive either counseling or methadone-only services. This study evaluates gender disparities in treatment plan progress in methadone- compared to counseling-based programs in one of the largest SUD treatment systems in the United States. Clients receiving methadone, the most common and highly effective MOUD in reducing opioid use, were less likely to make progress towards or complete their treatment plan than those receiving counseling. Women, and in particular those identified as Latinas, were least likely to benefit from methadone-based programs. These findings have implications for health policy and program design that consider the need for comprehensive and culturally responsive services in methadone-based programs to improve outpatient treatment outcomes among women.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00389-4>

The relationship between family intimacy and relapse tendency among people who use drugs: a moderated mediation model

Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, Treatment, and Policy – June 8, 2021

Drug addiction is difficult to overcome. The relapse rate is high, and the negative impact on individuals, families and society is severe, therefore exploring social psychological mechanisms to reduce relapse has very important theoretical and practical value. However, the underlying mechanism by which the interaction between family and individual factors influences the tendency to relapse remain unclear. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the relationship between family intimacy and relapse tendency of people who use drugs, as well as the mediating effects of psychological capital and self-efficacy. The results of this study found that family intimacy scores of people who use drugs was low and that low family intimacy was associated with higher tendency toward relapse. These results

suggest that treatment programs should address family intimacy issues and take various measures to enhance psychological capital and self-efficacy of the people who use drugs, which may be helpful in reducing relapse tendency.

<https://substanceabusepolicy.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13011-021-00386-7>

Telehealth

Telehealth boom expected to flatten, according to new report

MedCityNews – June 28, 2021

A newly published report by analytics firm, Trilliant Health, shows the demand for telehealth services is expected to decrease or remain the same across the U.S. In the meantime, telehealth companies are making more modest projections for the year as competition ramps up. The report found that after surging to new heights in April and May of last year, demand for telehealth services began to decline in early 2021. The results were based on claims data representing 309 million patients across all 50 states, including commercial and Medicare claims. Trilliant's chief research officer and the author of the report, Sanjula Jain, suggests most people still prefer in-person treatment. The primary users for telehealth also remained similar before and during the pandemic, even as the temporary closing of offices drove up demand for virtual visits. More than a third of telehealth visits in 2020 were coded as mental or behavioral health visits. But mental health had already been the leading use case for telehealth since 2019, and continued to be in 2021.

<https://medcitynews.com/2021/06/telehealth-boom-expected-to-flatten-according-to-new-report/>

Uncertain Telehealth Laws Keep Substance Abuse Care Providers on Their Toes

mHealthIntelligence – June 28, 2021

Telehealth adoption has surged during the coronavirus pandemic, particularly in treatments for people dealing with substance abuse issues. And that trend will likely continue as providers look for more and better ways to manage care for a fast-growing population. Much of that growth in connected health services was driven by state and federal waivers issued over the past year and a half to boost telehealth access and coverage to address COVID-19. But with the pandemic winding down, several states are ending their public health emergencies, leaving providers scrambling to figure out what they can and can't do. Providers who might have been using telehealth platforms to treat patients might suddenly find themselves unable to do so if their state reverts to pre-COVID-19 telehealth rules. Some states have revised their telehealth rules to allow more coverage and access after COVID-19, while others are waiting on the federal government to set a long-term policy. On a federal level, providers are limited by the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008, which restricts the prescribing of controlled substances by telehealth. Telehealth advocates have long lobbied the federal government to create a registration process for providers wishing to use telehealth, and while the federal government has loosened a few of the rules during the pandemic, those freedoms end with the end of the public health emergency.

<https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/uncertain-telehealth-laws-keep-substance-abuse-care-providers-on-their-toes>