

# Brief: Chemical Dependency

LIVE UNITED



United Way  
of Snohomish County

## General Description

Chemical dependency (or substance abuse) is a progressive disease. In most individuals, dependency begins slowly and grows until their life becomes progressively unmanageable. Consequences are often reflected in every aspect of the individual's life, including their family, health, school, and work.<sup>1</sup> Left untreated, the negative outcomes associated with substance abuse are numerous, ranging from more frequent arrests to long-term health challenges. However, substance abusers who recognize that they need treatment and are able to take the steps to receive it are much more likely to engage in behaviors that are positive in the long term. These behaviors can result in better employment opportunities, higher earnings, and positive interpersonal relationships.

Snohomish County manages the publicly funded chemical dependency treatment system for adults and youth in Snohomish County, which receives funding through 1/10 of 1% of sales taxes.<sup>2</sup> These activities include certified chemical dependency treatment (both in- and outpatient), various drug courts, and training for providers, first responders, and law enforcement personnel. These programs are primarily targeted toward indigent and low-income alcoholics and addicts.<sup>3</sup>

## Relationship to Poverty

**Access:** The biggest obstacles to receiving treatment are cost and lack of insurance coverage.<sup>4</sup> Among those actually able to access treatment, nearly half reportedly used their own money to pay for care. For the nearly 90,000 families in Snohomish County struggling to make ends meet,<sup>5</sup> the option of paying for care out-of-pocket likely does not exist. Often the only services available to those who are not on Medicaid (or do not have other forms of coverage) are those that are most expensive (both to society and the individual), such as crisis intervention and hospitalization.<sup>6</sup> The costs of legal services to facilitate treatment instead of incarceration are also not financially accessible to low-income individuals, as free legal assistance through the Northwest Justice Project is primarily limited to non-criminal problems.<sup>7</sup>

Eligibility requirements for many public assistance programs (such as public housing) often restrict or deny the applicant for a misdemeanor criminal record (like a drug offense) or if a member of their family or another household member commits a misdemeanor offense. Drug testing is also a requirement for many applicants. This contributes to the "criminalization" of both poverty and chemical dependency by obstructing access to safety net assistance programs and further reducing an individual's chance to get out of poverty and achieve self-sufficiency.<sup>8</sup>

**Inequity/Criminality:** Although rates of drug use and selling are comparable across racial lines, people of color are far more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, prosecuted, convicted and incarcerated for drug law violations than are whites. African-Americans and Latinos are subject to higher rates of incarceration, and disproportionately sentenced to much lengthier terms, reducing work time of young individuals over a decade by 25-30% compared to those not incarcerated.<sup>9,10</sup>

### Example programs that might fall under this focus area:

- Treatment Programs
- Diversion Programs
- Legal Access
- Prevention Awareness

### Snohomish County Stats:

- Population: 736,151
  - Under 18: 171,403
  - 18 to 64: 479,610
  - Over 64: 85,138
- Poverty Rate: 10.2
  - Under 18: 13.6
  - 18 to 64: 9.4
  - Over 64: 7.5

Source: U.S. Census 2015, 5-yr avg.

## Effects on Youth

In Snohomish County, 80% of youth who need chemical dependency treatment do not receive it due to lack of financial resources or treatment program availability.<sup>11</sup>

Snohomish County 8th graders were substantially more likely than 8<sup>th</sup> graders in other Washington counties to have abused prescription drugs in the last 30 days. 12th graders in Snohomish County were more likely than those in other counties to have ever tried cocaine or heroin.<sup>12</sup>

Nearly 2/3 of all 12<sup>th</sup> graders and 1/2 of all 10<sup>th</sup> graders in Snohomish County have tried alcohol and almost 20% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report current<sup>13</sup> binge drinking.<sup>14</sup> Substance use at a young age increases both the risk of dependency and the likelihood of related injuries from vehicle crashes, unprotected sex, and interpersonal violence.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond just their own use, children are vulnerable to the effects of their parents' chemical dependency. A national study showed that as much as 2/3 of child maltreatment cases were connected to substance abuse.<sup>16</sup>

While some research indicates that children of addicted parents are at increased risk of substance abuse,<sup>17</sup> others have found that childhood poverty does not necessarily correlate with increased use.<sup>18</sup>

## Effects on Adults

19% of households participating in the 2010 Snohomish County Low Income Needs Assessment reported having at least one person who had received substance abuse treatment in the preceding year.<sup>19</sup>

Opioid use, especially heroin, is an increasingly serious problem in Snohomish County. From 2011 to 2013, approximately 20% of heroin deaths in the state occurred locally. In 2013 alone, heroin and prescription opioid overdoses represented two-thirds (67%) of the 130 accidental overdose deaths in the county.<sup>20</sup>

Approximately 9% of residents (age 12 or older) in the Snohomish County region (Region 2) reported dependence or abuse of drugs or alcohol.<sup>21</sup> Nearly 7% reported that they did not receive needed treatment for alcohol abuse, while 2.4% did not receive treatment for their drug use. In all of these categories, Region 2 rates are higher than the Washington State rates.<sup>22</sup>

3 out of 4 male arrestees in Snohomish County tested positive for an illicit substance in 2006. Nationally, 60-80% of adults in jail have a chemical dependency disorder.<sup>23</sup> Inmates who suffer from chemical dependency have higher rates of recidivism, meaning services like treatment are very important in breaking the cycle of both addiction and repeated incarceration.<sup>24</sup>

## Effects on Seniors

Substance abuse among older adults is one of the fastest growing health problems: national estimates believe the issue affects up to 17% of older adults. Applied to Snohomish County, this would mean as many as 14,000 seniors were struggling with alcohol and prescription drug misuse.<sup>25</sup>

Nationally, as many as 11% of elderly hospital admissions are a result of alcohol or drug problems. Physicians often receive little education on substance abuse in older adults, resulting in symptoms being misdiagnosed as signs of aging.<sup>26</sup>

From 2004 to 2008, there was a 121% increase in senior emergency visits involving prescription medicine misuse. Seniors are more likely to be prescribed long-term and multiple prescriptions, they have an increased risk of medication abuse and misuse.<sup>27</sup>

Older adult binge drinking is a problem. Nationally, 14% of men and 3% of women age 65 and older binge drink. Standard diagnostic criteria for abuse or dependence are often difficult to apply to older adults, leading to under-identification of the problem.<sup>28</sup>

Older women are prescribed more and consume more psychoactive drugs than men. Older women are also more likely to be long-term users, yet have more barriers to alcohol and drug treatment. They are more likely to live – and drink – alone, more likely to have less insurance, income, and more likely to live in poverty.<sup>29</sup>

## Other Populations of Interest

**Communities of Color:** Nationally, African-Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately incarcerated for drug law violations despite usage rates similar to other minorities and lower than whites.<sup>30</sup> For example, African-Americans account for 14% of regular drug users but are 37% of those arrested for drug offenses.<sup>31</sup> Consequences of incarceration range from loss of employment to inability to access public housing and assistance. Barring incarceration, a drug conviction alone often imposes a lifelong ban on many aspects of social, economic and civic life.<sup>32</sup>

**Tribal Populations:** Native Americans are disproportionately represented among heroin deaths in the county, with a rate more than six times greater than that of whites. Native Americans were also more likely to die from heroin than other races in Washington. 9% of heroin overdoses in Snohomish County occurred to Native Americans, who only account for 1.2% of the county's population.<sup>33</sup>

**People Experiencing Homelessness:** Drug or alcohol use has been cited one of the top causes of homelessness in Snohomish County since 2007.<sup>34</sup> For people who are already struggling to pay their bills, the onset or exacerbation of an addiction may cause them to lose their already precarious housing. However, substance abuse can also be a result of homelessness as people who are homeless may turn to drugs and alcohol as a way to cope with their situation or attain temporary relief from their problems.<sup>35</sup>

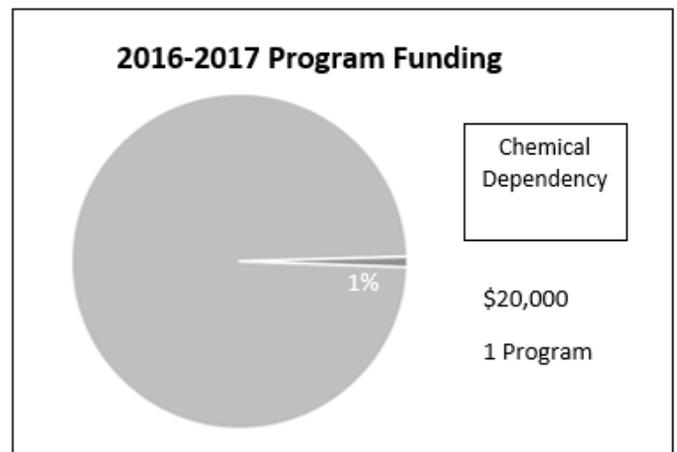
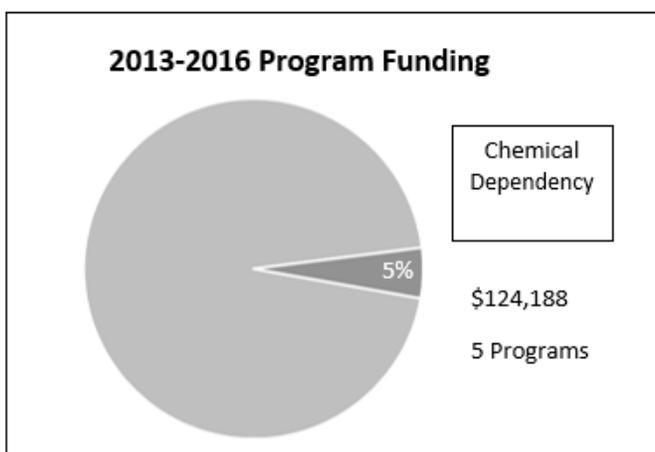
## Strategies in Practice

Expand capacity for detoxification services with particular attention given to areas and municipalities outside of the Everett core (e.g., South County, North County).<sup>36</sup>

Expand medication-assisted treatment for those with heroin or opioid addictions. Research shows that when treating substance use disorders, a combination of medication and behavioral therapies (medication-assisted treatment, or MAT) is most successful.<sup>37</sup>

Invest in programs that help divert people into treatment rather than incarceration. Minimize barriers (such as drug testing or ineligibility due to drug convictions) to much-needed supports like employment, public housing, and public assistance that are critical to those struggling with addiction.<sup>38</sup>

## Past United Way Funding



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- <sup>2</sup> "Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan," *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>3</sup> "1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% Sales Tax Annual Report 2013: Serving the Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Needs of our Most Vulnerable Populations," *Snohomish County Department of Human Services*, 2013, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/16592>.
- <sup>4</sup> "New Data Show Millions of Americans with Alcohol and Drug Addiction Could Benefit from Health Care R," *Partnership for Drug-Free Kids*, September 28, 2010, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.drugfree.org/new-data-show-millions-of-americans-with-alcohol-and-drug-addiction-could-benefit-from-health-care-r/>.
- <sup>5</sup> "ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained Employed: Study of Financial Hardship," *United Ways of the Pacific Northwest*, 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.uwsc.org/sites/uwsc.org/files/alicesnocoreportfeb2017.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> "Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan," *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>7</sup> "Investing in Families: Briefing Paper on Legal Service Needs of Homeless Families," *Workforce Snohomish*, February 2012, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.workforcesnohomish.org/advance/iif/documents/reports/LegalReport.pdf>.
- <sup>8</sup> Dolan, Karen and Carr, J.L., "The Poor Get Prison: The Alarming Spread of Criminalization of Poverty," *The Institute for Policy Studies*, 2015, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/IPS-The-Poor-Get-Prison-Final.pdf>.
- <sup>9</sup> "Race and the Drug War," *Drug Policy Alliance*, (website) accessed January 21, 2106, <http://www.drugpolicy.org/race-and-drug-war>.
- <sup>10</sup> "Criminal Justice Fact Sheet," *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, (website) accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.naacp.org/pages/criminal-justice-fact-sheet>.
- <sup>11</sup> "Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan," *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>12</sup> "Youth Drug Use," *Snohomish Health District*, 2014, accessed January 21, 2106, [http://www.snohd.org/Portals/0/Snohd/Reports/files/Drug\\_Use\\_HYS\\_2014FINAL.pdf](http://www.snohd.org/Portals/0/Snohd/Reports/files/Drug_Use_HYS_2014FINAL.pdf).
- <sup>13</sup> Within 30 days of the survey.
- <sup>14</sup> "Youth Alcohol Use," *Snohomish Health District*.
- <sup>15</sup> Stagman, Shannon, Schwarz, S.W., and Powers, D., "Adolescent Substance Use in the U.S.: Facts for Policymakers," *National Center for Children in Poverty*, May 2011, accessed January 21, 2016, [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub\\_1008.html#3](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_1008.html#3).
- <sup>16</sup> "Parental Substance Use and the Child Welfare System," *Child Welfare Information Gateway*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, October 2014, accessed January 21, 2106, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parentalsubabuse.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> "Children of Addicted Parents: Important Facts," *National Association for Children of Alcoholics*, 2000, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.nacoa.net/pdfs/addicted.pdf>.
- <sup>18</sup> "Childhood economic status affects substance use among young adults," *Duke Medical News and Communication*, *Duke Medicine*, July 30, 2013, accessed January 21, 2016, [http://corporate.dukemedicine.org/news\\_and\\_publications/news\\_office/news/childhood-economic-status-affects-substance-use-among-young-adults](http://corporate.dukemedicine.org/news_and_publications/news_office/news/childhood-economic-status-affects-substance-use-among-young-adults).
- <sup>19</sup> "2010 Snohomish County Low Income Needs Assessment: A study of needs and services for low-income households in Snohomish County, Washington," *Snohomish County Human Services, Community Action Partnership Division*, 2010, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/6700>.
- <sup>20</sup> Serafin, Mark and Fenn, R., "Heroin in Snohomish County: Mortality and Treatment Trends," *Snohomish Health District and Snohomish County Human Services*, January 2015, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.heraldnet.com/assets/pdf/DH329215127.pdf>.
- <sup>21</sup> "Washington," *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*, 2012, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/substate2k12-StateTabs/NSDUHsubstateStateTabsWA2012.htm>.
- <sup>22</sup> "Washington," *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)*.

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- <sup>23</sup> “Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan” *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>24</sup> “Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan” *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>25</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, “Chapter 1 – Substance Abuse Among Older Adults: An Invisible Epidemic,” in Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 26, *U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Rockville, MD*, 1998, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64422/>
- <sup>26</sup> “Alcohol, Drug Dependence and Seniors,” *National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence*, last modified June 2015, accessed January 21, 2016, <https://www.ncadd.org/about-addiction/seniors/alcohol-drug-dependence-and-seniors?>
- <sup>27</sup> “Older Americans Behavioral Health Issue Brief 5: Prescription Medication Misuse and Abuse Among Older Adults,” *Agency on Aging and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, 2012, accessed January 21, 2016, [http://www.aoa.acl.gov/AoA\\_Programs/HPW/Behavioral/docs2/Issue%20Brief%205%20Prescription%20Med%20Misuse%20Abuse.pdf](http://www.aoa.acl.gov/AoA_Programs/HPW/Behavioral/docs2/Issue%20Brief%205%20Prescription%20Med%20Misuse%20Abuse.pdf).
- <sup>28</sup> “Older Americans Behavior Health Issue Brief 2: Alcohol Misuse and Abuse Prevention,” *Agency on Aging*, 2012, accessed January 21, 2016, [http://www.aoa.gov/AoA\\_Programs/HPW/Behavioral/docs2/Issue%20Brief%202%20Alcohol%20Misuse.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/AoA_Programs/HPW/Behavioral/docs2/Issue%20Brief%202%20Alcohol%20Misuse.pdf).
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- <sup>34</sup> “2016 PIT Summary for Snohomish County,” *Snohomish County Human Services*, 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/34385>.
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- <sup>36</sup> “Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan,” *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>37</sup> “Snohomish County Mental Health and Chemical Dependency Action Plan,” *Snohomish County*.
- <sup>38</sup> “The Drug War, Mass Incarceration and Race,” *The Drug Policy Alliance*.