



## Are States Considering the Evidence in Addiction Treatment?

Analyzing state implementation of evidence-based practices for alcohol and drug disorder treatment

### SUMMARY

From October 2006 through January 2010, researchers at Oregon Health and Science University conducted three annual surveys of state agencies responsible for substance abuse programs. The purpose of these surveys was to gauge the extent of efforts to implement evidence-based practices for substance abuse treatment.

### Findings

- In promoting the use of evidence-based practices, states were concentrating on education, training and infrastructure development.
- Some 31 of the 48 states (and the District of Columbia) that responded to the survey reported using evidence-based practices as a criterion in contracts with treatment providers.<sup>1</sup>
- The use of proven psychosocial interventions and addiction medications increased significantly from 2007 to 2009 while wraparound services decreased.

### Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project with two grants totaling \$369,692.

### CONTEXT

From 2004 through 2007, the National Quality Forum identified and developed voluntary consensus standards for a core set of evidence-based practices for treating substance abuse disorders, including:

- Screening and brief intervention

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<sup>1</sup> State names have been withheld by the researchers.

- Psychosocial intervention
- Pharmacotherapy
- Wraparound services
- Aftercare and recovery management

The forum also identified strategies for promoting the adoption of evidence-based practices, including:

- Financial incentives and payment mechanisms
- Regulations and accreditation
- Education and training
- Infrastructure development
- Research and knowledge translation

This work was supported by two grants from RWJF. See [Program Results](#) for ID# 049909 and [Program Results](#) for ID# 052638.

State agencies that oversee substance abuse treatment could play a key role in accelerating the adoption of evidence-based practices in the field, according to Traci Rieckmann, Ph.D., the project director for the grants covered in this report. However, little was known about how much those agencies were doing to promote such practices.

### **RWJF's Interest in This Area**

In 2006 and again in 2008, RWJF awarded \$2.2 million in grants to six state/provider partnerships through its *Advancing Recovery: State/Provider Partnerships for Quality Addiction Care* initiative to improve the quality of alcohol and drug addiction treatment in the United States by promoting the use of evidence-based practices.

Except for this program, however, RWJF has moved away from funding in the addiction area.

## **THE PROJECT**

From October 2006 through January 2010, researchers at Oregon Health and Science University conducted three annual surveys of state agencies responsible for substance abuse programs to gauge the extent of efforts to implement evidence-based practices for substance abuse treatment. The surveys focused on the practices and strategies identified by the National Quality Forum.

The research team conducted the surveys under two RWJF grants:

- The first grant (ID# 058839) supported a baseline survey responded to by officials in 48 states (one with two agencies responsible for substance abuse treatment) and the District of Columbia in 2006–2007 to identify efforts to promote the use of evidence-based practices.<sup>2</sup>
- The second grant (ID# 063878) supported follow-up surveys in 2008 and 2009 with officials in every state and the District of Columbia to track progress on implementation efforts.

## Communications

The researchers published an article, "Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices for Treatment of Alcohol and Drug Disorders: The Role of the State Authority," in the *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*. Abstract available [online](#). (See the [Bibliography](#).)

They also made presentations to seven organizations, including the American Public Health Association and the Substance Abuse Policy Research Consortium.

## FINDINGS

### Baseline Survey, 2006–2007

The research team reported the following findings, based on the 2006–2007 baseline survey, in the article in the *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*:

- **In promoting the use of evidence-based practices, states were concentrating on education, training and infrastructure development.** There was less use of financial mechanisms, regulations and accreditation.
- **Some 31 of the 49 responding states<sup>3</sup> reported using evidence-based practices as a criterion in contracts with treatment providers.** Of the 18 states that did not require evidence-based practices through their contracts:
  - Seven required specific evidence-based practices.
  - Ten required the use of evidence-based practices, but do not specify which ones.
  - Three encouraged the use of evidence-based practices through contractual or departmental policies.

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<sup>2</sup> State names have been withheld by the researchers.

<sup>3</sup> The number "49 states" includes the District of Columbia

- Five required the use of evidence-based practices in some special program contracts including prevention but not in treatment.
- Six did not elaborate on their contracting criteria.
- **Some 25 states reported that the use of evidence-based practices was tied to state funding.** And 27 reported the use of regulations and accreditation as mechanisms for advancing the use of evidence-based practices.
- **Oregon was the only state with a law financially mandating implementation of evidence-based practices in substance abuse treatment.** North Carolina and Alaska had less specific statutory mandates.

### **Follow-up Surveys, 2008–2009**

The research team reported the following findings, based on the 2008 and 2009 follow-up surveys, in a report to RWJF:

- **The use of proven psychosocial interventions and addiction medications increased significantly from 2007 to 2009 while wraparound services decreased.** Psychosocial interventions include such therapies as:

- Motivational interviewing/motivational enhancement theory
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Twelve-step facilitation therapy

Practices remaining relatively constant included screening and brief intervention and aftercare and recovery management. The project director suggested that the decrease in the use of wraparound services and the failure of other practices to grow may have been related to state budget cuts forced by the nationwide economic crisis.

- **State substance abuse agencies are giving priority attention to vulnerable populations.** Groups receiving particular attention from states include:

- Women with children (94% of states)
- Women generally (69%)
- Hispanics (61%)
- Veterans (61%)
- Cognitively impaired and traumatic brain injury patients (41%)
- African Americans (39%)
- American Indians and Alaska Natives (37%)
- Immigrants (28%)

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Researchers conducting interviews should ask quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) questions separately to ensure a smooth flow of data collection.** Project staff found that alternating these types of questions tended to produce brief answers to open-ended questions rather than the desired in-depth responses. (Project Director)
2. **Build networks and relationships in any study requiring the cooperation and collaboration of expert informants.** Ongoing dialogue and engagement with study participants proved essential to this study and in laying the groundwork for future studies. (Project Director)
3. **When doing research on government programs for vulnerable populations, be sure to seek adequate funding for sufficient interviews.** Project staff found that while some officials could answer general questions about such outreach efforts, they lacked the detailed knowledge of the officials directly involved, and the project was not funded for these additional interviews. (Project Director)

## AFTERWARD

No further follow-up surveys are planned.

The project team received a grant from the Medical Research Foundation for research on substance abuse policy and practice targeting American Indians and Native Alaskans. The study will focus on states that reported prioritizing these populations in this project.

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RWJF Team: Vulnerable Populations

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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### Articles

Rieckmann TR, Fussell HE, Kovas AE and Stettler NM. "Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices for Treatment of Alcohol and Drug Disorders: The Role of the State Authority." *Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*, 36(4), 407–419, 2009. Abstract available [online](#). Article available for a fee.

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