

Where We Stand: Addiction on Cape Cod

Cape Cod is a treasured destination that has captured the imagination of our country for decades. It's also the beloved home to more than 200,000 year-round locals across fifteen towns and numerous villages. It's dynamic, beautiful, and steeped in culture. And like any region throughout Massachusetts and across the United States, our families, our friends, and our communities are affected by substance use and addiction.

Cape Cod has a long history of coordinating regional substance use prevention, treatment, and recovery efforts across the Cape. Since January 2014, the Barnstable County Regional Substance Abuse Council (RSAC) has coordinated a regional approach to substance use and connected the variety of efforts already underway.

The RSAC brings together a diverse group of nearly 40 stakeholders from our community: town governments and law enforcement, faith leaders and students, people in recovery and families affected by addiction, and health and human services agencies. As a group of concerned and united individuals, we are committed to making a difference together.

But there's a lot of work to be done. Opioid addiction is a public health crisis in the United States: from the shores of Cape Cod to the coast of California, and every town, city, and suburb in between. Every part of a community is touched by addiction. It takes every part of a community to address it.

Through our community's efforts we can reduce substance use among our youth, raise awareness about the risks associated with prescription medications and other drugs, and provide treatment, recovery, and hope to individuals and families affected by addiction.

Addiction is a chronic brain disease. It causes a person to compulsively seek and use drugs, despite harmful consequences to themselves and loved ones. Addiction changes the brain – both its structure and how it works.

People may start to take drugs for many reasons. Some people who suffer from stress or depression begin using alcohol or drugs in an attempt to feel better. Others may think drugs can help improve their performance in school, work, or sports.

Drugs can quickly take over a person's life. Over time, activities become less enjoyable and taking the drug becomes necessary for someone to "feel normal."

The stigma of drug misuse keeps people from seeking treatment. Words like "junkie" and "addict" can hurt, damaging self-image and standing in the way of recovery.

Addiction is not a choice, it is a treatable disease. Addiction cannot always be cured, but like other chronic diseases – such as diabetes – it can be managed successfully with time and treatment. Recovery is possible.