

DISASTERS AND PEOPLE WHO USE OR MISUSE SUBSTANCES

Disasters affect everyone who experiences them, but they may have worse and different impacts on people who use or misuse substances. Every day, people with substance use and misuse issues and substance use disorders face stigma in healthcare settings. This can feed into a cycle of more substance use or misuse, greater negative impacts, and worsening health.

The cycle can be disrupted with compassionate, evidence-based care that puts people first and meets them where they are.

Read on for tips and best practices for resilience, preparation, and post-disaster well-being for the public and professionals.



How can I find help for myself or someone else?

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or misuse, mental health problems, or mental disorders, compassionate, unbiased help is available. Resources include [FindTreatment.gov](https://www.findtreatment.gov) and [SAMHSA's National Helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/national-helpline) available at 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) or TTY at 1-800-487-4889. You also may want to check out SAMHSA's [Find Support](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support) and [Encuentra Apoyo](https://www.samhsa.gov/encuentra-apoyo) websites.



How does disaster affect people who use or misuse substances?

Studies show that disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, incidents of mass violence, oil spills, water contamination crises, etc.) put people in danger and negatively impact their physical and mental health. Disasters also interfere with the ability of important and much-needed programs to provide ongoing substance use and misuse prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

DID YOU KNOW?



During the **COVID-19 pandemic** overdose rates increased as much as **42%**.



People affected by the Flint, Michigan, water crisis in 2014 and 2015 who believed the crisis had **negatively affected their health** were **more likely to use or misuse substances** in ways that caused problems in their daily lives.



Natural disasters may disrupt communities, causing **loss of social connections**, and **make it difficult or impossible** for survivors to **access treatment and mental health services**.

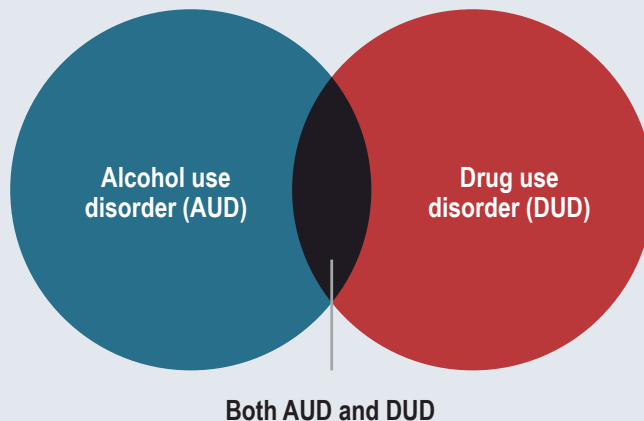
Who are people with substance use disorders?

Many different people have or may develop a substance use or misuse issue or condition. In the United States, 48.7 million people, or 17.3%, have a substance use disorder. Of this population:

29.5 million have an alcohol use disorder

27.2 million have a drug use disorder

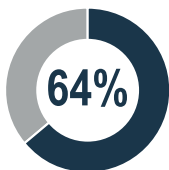
8.0 million have both an alcohol use disorder and a drug use disorder



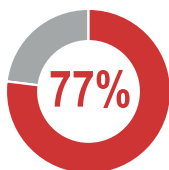
Who is affected?



Around the world, **men are four times as likely** as women to have a substance use disorder.



Among people with opioid use disorder, **64% have a mental illness.**



One study found that at least **77% of people** who experienced a traumatic event before 16 years of age had a substance use disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder later in life.



People of **all races** have lived experience of substance use disorders.

How are disasters different for people with past or present lived experience of substance use or misuse?

Disasters affect individuals with past or present experience of substance use or misuse differently from the full population:

- After disasters, people may experience both substance use disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder.
- Injection drug use may increase after a disaster, and people who use drugs may be more likely to engage in high-risk activities such as reusing needles after disasters due to supply disruptions.
- Disaster-related disruptions in health care and behavioral health care, which affect the whole community, may be particularly difficult for people in recovery from substance use disorders who use methadone and other opioid agonist treatments as part of treatment and services to manage their recovery.

What can disaster behavioral health and other public health professionals do?

- Use federal emergency funding to help communities maintain access to supports (prevention programs, public education materials, and health campaigns).
- Train crisis counselors to identify signs that a disaster survivor is struggling with substance use or misuse, and provide them with local organizations where they can refer survivors for peer support and clinical care.
- Train emergency and disaster responders to use trauma-informed practices to better help people with substance use disorders and issues and have drug overdose reversal medications on hand.

You can learn more about the impacts of disaster on people who use or misuse substances, as well as approaches to preventing or mitigating these impacts, in the [People With Substance Use Issues and Conditions and Disasters Supplemental Research Bulletin](#).

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