

Landmark Surgeon General Report Tackles Addiction



- Surgeon General Urges MDs to Help End US Opioid Epidemic
- US Opioid Epidemic Fueled by Prescribing Practices
- - The first-ever *Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health* reviews what we know about substance misuse and how you can use that knowledge to address substance misuse and related consequences

The US surgeon general has taken on the nation's addiction crisis, issuing a landmark report on substance misuse and related disorders.

"Today I am issuing the first-ever report on alcohol, drugs, and health," Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, told reporters in a conference call.

"With this report, I'm calling our country to action around one of the most underrecognized and underaddressed public health issues of our time," he said.

Dr Murthy detailed the staggering figures that speak for themselves in underscoring the severity of the problem — 20.8 million people in the country with substance use disorders, which is approximately the same number of people with diabetes and 1.5 times the number of people with all cancers combined.

"Despite this, only 1 in 10 people with substance abuse disorders are getting treatment," Dr Murthy said. "That is unacceptable, and we have to close the gap."

The [report](#), *Facing Addiction in America: The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health*, addresses a broad array of issues, ranging from illicit drug abuse to prescription drug addiction, alcohol use, binge drinking, and teen alcoholism. It is being compared in its significance and potential impact to the surgeon general's *1964 Report on Smoking and Health*, which put a spotlight on the health risks of tobacco.

Cultural Shift

Dr Murthy said that, similar to the 1964 report, the new report strives to set the wheels in motion for a "culture shift." However, in contrast to the smoking report, which sought to stigmatize a practice that was socially acceptable at the time, the new report seeks to destigmatize addiction and change negative perceptions that stand in the way of addiction being regarded as a chronic disease.

"I am calling for a cultural shift in how we think about addiction, recognizing that it is not a moral failing or evidence of a character flaw but a chronic disease of the brain that deserves our compassion and care," Dr Murthy said.

The report outlines key findings on the neurobiology of substance use and addiction, the benefits of prevention, treatment strategies, and the essential role of healthcare systems in addressing substance use disorders.

Among the many misconceptions regarding addiction are misunderstandings about the roles of methadone and buprenorphine that have hindered their availability.

"Similar attitudinal barriers hinder the adoption of harm reduction strategies like needle/syringe exchange programs, which evidence shows can reduce the spread of infectious diseases among individuals who inject drugs," the report states.

Dr Murthy spoke of the need to increase investment in alternatives to opioids for pain management.

"We are urging clinicians right now to treat pain with nonopioid medications and strategies whenever possible, but that toolbox is more limited than I would like it to be," he said.

"We need pharmaceutical companies and academia and government to work together to expand the tools we have to treat pain that are not opioid-based.

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