

# Screening, Diagnosis and Referral for Alcohol and Substance Use Disorders

The following guidelines recommends detection, diagnosis, treatment and referral considerations for substance use disorders

Eligible Population	Key Components	Recommendation and Level of Evidence
Adolescents and adults	Detection/Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Screen by history for substance use at every health maintenance exam or initial pregnancy visit (repeat as indicated), using a validated screening tool (improves accuracy of detecting substance use or dependence)<sup>1</sup> [D]</li> <li>■ Maintain high index of concern for substance use in persons with:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Family history of substance use disorder [B]</li> <li>◆ Recent stressful life events and lack of social supports</li> <li>◆ Chronic pain or illness, trauma</li> <li>◆ Mental Illness (e.g. depression, bipolar disorder, etc)</li> <li>◆ Drug seeking behaviors</li> <li>◆ Physical and cognitive disabilities</li> <li>◆ Started alcohol use before age 15</li> <li>◆ Medical condition associated with substance use</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>Substance dependence or abuse indicates a maladaptive pattern of substance use resulting in clinically significant impairment or distress. Relevant issue include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Recurrent substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations</li> <li>◆ Recurrent substance use in situations that are physically hazardous</li> <li>◆ Recurrent substance-related legal problems</li> <li>◆ Substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems</li> <li>◆ Tolerance, withdrawal, use in larger amounts or over a longer period than intended</li> <li>◆ Persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down</li> <li>◆ Great deal of time spent in obtaining, using or recovering from use of the substance</li> <li>◆ Reduction in social, occupational or recreational activities because of substance use</li> <li>◆ Substance use continues despite knowledge of problems</li> </ul>	
Patients with Substance Use Disorder	Patient Education and Brief Intervention by PCP or Trained Staff (e.g. RN, MSW, etc.) [A]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Assess patient's risk, understanding and readiness to change</li> <li>◆ Discuss the relationship of substance use to presenting medical concerns or psychosocial problems</li> <li>◆ Negotiate goals and strategies for reducing consumption and other change</li> <li>◆ Involve family members as appropriate</li> </ul>
	Referral Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Consider referral to community-based services (e.g., Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous) or Employee Assistance Program, or (especially if substance dependent) a substance abuse or behavioral health specialist. [D]</li> <li>◆ Pharmacologic management should be conducted by or in collaboration with physicians who have expertise in the are of substance use disorders. [D]</li> <li>◆ Schedule appropriate follow-up within 30 days to re-assess and support behavior change</li> <li>◆ If screening positive, schedule an initial treatment appointment within 14 days of diagnosis</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Validated tools include: Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), TWEAK (for pregnant women), Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST, MAST-G) CAGE Survey, Substance Abuse Subtle Screening Inventory (SASSI), Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST)

**Levels of Evidence for the most significant recommendations:** A=randomized controlled trials; B=controlled trials, no randomization; C=observational studies; D=opinion of expert panel

This guideline lists core management steps for non-behavioral health specialists. It is based on several sources including: Practice Guidelines for the Treatment of Patients With Substance Use Disorders, American Psychiatric Association, August 2006 ([psycho.org](http://psycho.org)). Individual patient considerations and advances in medical science may supersede or modify these recommendations.