



City of
Philadelphia

Department of Behavioral Health
and Intellectual disAbility Services

UNDERSTANDING ALCOHOL USE DISORDER



Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) is a **medical condition** characterized by a person's drinking causing **distress or harm**. Affecting millions of Americans, AUD can lead to serious **physical, emotional, and social consequences**. Excessive alcohol use contributes to over **140,000 deaths annually** in the U.S., according to the CDC. Recognizing this as a health condition provides a foundation for inclusive and hopeful treatment and support.

Key Facts

- **Binge Drinking:** Consuming **five or more drinks** (men) or **four or more** (women) on a single occasion (CDC definition).
- **Heavy Drinking:** **15 or more drinks** per week (men) or **eight or more** (women).
- Alcohol Use Disorder **increases the risk** of chronic diseases like **liver disease, heart disease, and certain cancers**.
- **Treatment** (SAMHSA-emphasized) includes **behavioral therapies, medications, and mutual-support groups**.

Warning Signs

- **Drinking more than intended** or trying unsuccessfully to cut down.
- **Spending excessive time** drinking or recovering from its effects, or experiencing strong cravings.
- **Continuing to drink** despite it causing problems at home, work, or with health (e.g., anxiety or depression).
- **Giving up** previously enjoyed activities to drink.

Through a network of treatment providers, the Philadelphia Single County Authority (SCA) guides recovery-oriented drug and alcohol treatment for people enrolled in Medicaid, as well as people who are uninsured and underinsured. Learn more at [DBHIDS.org/bh](https://www.dbhids.org/bh).



ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

Tips for Healthier Choices and Resources

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Photo: Steve Weinik

TIPS TO REDUCE RISK

(based on CDC and SAMHSA guidance)

To reduce risk:

- Set and stick to limits on how much you will drink.
- Choose alcohol-free days and alternate drinks with water to stay hydrated.
- Eat before and while drinking to slow absorption.
- Find healthier coping strategies and avoid drinking when stressed or upset.
- Never drink and drive.
- Do not drink if you are pregnant, under 21, or on certain medications.

RESOURCES

If you or someone you care about is struggling with alcohol use, trusted support is available 24/7. You don't have to go through this alone.

Immediate Crisis and National Support

- Suicide and Crisis Lifeline **988**: Call or text 988 if you or someone is in crisis.
- SAMHSA National Helpline: Call **800-662-HELP** (4357) (24/7) for confidential support and treatment referral information.

Philadelphia Local Contacts

- **HealthyMindsPhilly.org** for free mental health screening.
- Community Behavioral Health (CBH): Call **888-545-2600** (24/7) for substance use disorder services.
- City of Philadelphia – Substance Use Prevention and Harm Reduction:
Visit **bit.ly/PHL-SUPHR** to find support groups, and harm-reduction services.

24/7 mental health and
substance use treatment
services.

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