

STEPS FOR RECOVERY

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ONDCP: Seeking Treatment a Positive New Year's Resolution

WASHINGTON—At the beginning of each new year, countless Americans make resolutions to change their behavior—losing weight, starting to exercise, spending more time with their families, or some other changes they hope will make them happier and healthier. Statistics show millions of Americans should consider another resolution: Seeking help for their abuse of substances such as alcohol, prescription medications, and illicit drugs.

"More than 20 million people who need treatment for substance abuse do not receive it," said Gil Kerlikowske, Director of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). "This is a problem we can begin to address by making people aware of treatment options available to them and encouraging families and friends to give their support to people seeking and receiving treatment."

Data compiled by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration show that in 2008 some 23.1 million people aged 12 and older needed treatment for a drug or alcohol use problem. However, only 2.3 million received treatment at a specialty facility.

"We are committed to making people aware of the treatment options available to them," said Kerlikowske. "We also need to encourage those who feel they need treatment to summon the courage to step forward and seek help, and we must let them know that seeking treatment is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength."

Dr. Thomas McLellan, Deputy Director of ONDCP and a specialist in addiction treatment, said that people who believe they or a loved one needs treatment should consider talking to a primary care physician, seeking help from a mental health professional, contacting an addiction treatment program, or attending a meeting of a mutual help organization. "There have never been as many evidence-based counseling methods and medications to help people overcome substance abuse as there are today," Dr. McLellan said.