

Health care costs drop if adolescent substance abusers use 12-step programs

June 1 2012

(Medical Xpress) -- The use of 12-step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, by adolescents with a history of drug and alcohol abuse not only reduces the risk of relapse but also leads to lower health care costs, according to research by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health.

The study, which appears in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, is the first to examine the cost implications of 12-step programs for adolescents.

Researchers studied 403 participants between 13 and 18 years old enrolled in Kaiser Permanente alcohol and drug treatment programs in northern California and followed their progress over seven years.

Past research has shown that adolescents with drug and alcohol problems are at risk for a number of negative outcomes, including poor academic performance, violence, depression and suicide, and chronic medical conditions such as asthma.

According to Dr. Marlon Mundt, assistant professor of family [medicine](#), for each 12-step meeting attended, medical costs were reduced by an estimated 4.7 percent or \$145 per year for hospital inpatient days, psychiatric visits, and alcohol and drug treatment.

"What is important to remember is that while the exact mechanism of the effect is not known, 12-step is linked to better health, and as a result,

lower medical costs in teenagers with a history of substance abuse," said Mundt.

Twelve-step programs, first established by Alcoholics Anonymous founder Bill Wilson in 1939, offer meetings and one-on-one consultations with recovering drug and alcohol abusers who want to become sober. The concept is copied by groups such as Cocaine Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

"Our findings suggest that in addition to providing support for their sobriety, 12-step participation may also help adolescents meet their physical and mental health recovery needs by supplementing formal medical and psychiatric services," said Mundt. "However, while 12-step participation may be an important complement to formal treatment, it should not be considered a substitute for needed formal psychiatric or [alcohol](#) and drug rehabilitation services, simply on the basis of cost."

The study was funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, and the National Institute on [Alcohol Abuse](#) and Alcoholism.

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

Citation: Health care costs drop if adolescent substance abusers use 12-step programs (2012, June 1) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-06-health-adolescent-substance-abused-step.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--