

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

May is **Mental Health Month**, a nationwide effort to raise public awareness and help end the stigma for people with mental health disorders. With 1 in 5 adults in America experiencing them, mental health disorders are far more common than people may realize. Additional statistics about mental health include:

- Nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a severe mental health disorder.
- One-half of all chronic mental health disorders begin by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24.
- Approximately 10.2 million adults have co-occurring mental health and addiction disorders.
- Roughly 50 percent of individuals with severe mental health disorders are affected by substance use disorders.
- Of all people diagnosed with a mental health disorder, 29% abuse either alcohol or drugs.

Understanding the link between substance abuse and mental health

When an individual has both a substance use and a mental health disorder (depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, etc.), it is called a co-occurring disorder. In co-occurring disorders, both the mental health disorder and the drug and/or alcohol addiction have their own unique symptoms. These symptoms may interfere with how a person functions at work or school, maintains a stable home life, handles stress, and relates to others. Though substance use disorders and mental health disorders are closely linked, one does not directly cause the other. However, co-occurring disorders can *affect* each other. When a mental health disorder goes untreated, the substance use disorder may get worse. When alcohol or drug use increases, mental health problems may increase, too. Below are a few common scenarios:

- Alcohol and drugs are often used to self-medicate the symptoms of mental health disorders. Unfortunately, their use may cause negative side effects and often worsens the symptoms they initially helped to relieve.
- Alcohol and drug abuse can increase the chance for mental health disorders to occur in those at risk for them. Mental health disorders are caused by a complex interplay of genetics, the environment, and other outside factors.
- Alcohol and drug abuse can make symptoms of a mental health disorder worse. Substance abuse may sharply increase symptoms of mental illness or even trigger new symptoms. Abuse of alcohol or drugs can also interact with medications such as antidepressants, anti-anxiety pills, and mood stabilizers, making them less effective at managing symptoms.

Treatment for substance use and mental health disorders

The best treatment for co-occurring disorders is one where both the substance use disorder and the mental health disorder are treated simultaneously. If you or someone you love is suffering from a mental health and/or substance use disorder, reach out to the professionals at your local treatment agency. In Adams County, those agencies are Adams Behavioral Health, Bowen Center, and Park Center. You are not alone. Again, co-occurring substance use disorders and mental health disorders are more common than many people realize. With the right support, self-help, and treatment, individuals can overcome a co-occurring disorder, reclaim their sense of self, and get their life back on track.