

Dual Diagnosis and Integrated Treatment of Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders



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What are dual diagnosis services?

Dual diagnosis services are treatments for people who experience both a mental illness (or illnesses) and substance abuse. To recover fully, a person needs to receive long term treatment for both. Treatment must also be personalized to the stage of recovery each individual is in. Dual diagnosis services include:

- assertive outreach
- helping with job and housing search
- family counseling
- money and relationship management

What happens when someone experiences mental illness and substance abuse at the same time?

A person will be more likely to be violent, not take their medication, and certain treatments may not be effective for them. Having both a mental illness and a substance abuse disorder can lead to poorer functioning. Those with a dual diagnosis may go through many treatment programs and hospitals. They can have more physical illnesses than a person with 1 disorder only might. They may also experience more episodes of psychosis.

Why is integrated treatment important?

Sometimes mental health services are not well prepared to help patients with 2 diagnosis. The individual may go back and forth between services for mental illness and services for substance abuse. Sometimes they may be refused treatment by both mental health and substance abuse services. Services that don't work together create a harder time for persons with 2 disorders. Well-functioning, integrated services allow for recovery and improved overall health.

What does effective integrated treatment entail?

Effective integrated treatment has substance abuse and mental health professionals, working together in one place. The person is given consistent treatment, with no division between mental health or substance abuse assistance. Clients with a 2 diagnosis have to be given treatment at their own pace. Clients are given the time to socialize, participate in social activities, and develop peer relationships. Families are given support and education, while learning not to react with guilt or blame but to learn to cope with two ongoing illnesses.

What are the key factors in effective integrated treatment?

- Treatment must be done in **stages**. First, the caregiver and client must learn to *trust* each other. This *motivates* the client to learn the skills to *actively control* their illnesses and focus on goals. This helps keep the client on track, *preventing relapse*. Treatment can begin at any one of these stages; the program is made to fit the individual.
- **Assertive outreach** is used to engage and keep in constant contact with clients. This includes deep case management, meeting at the client's home, and other ways to create a relationship where client and caregiver can depend on each other.
- **Motivational interventions**, through education, support and counseling, which help empower clients to see the importance of their goals and illness self-management.
- **Counseling** helps develop positive coping patterns, cognitive and behavioral skills. Counseling can be done as an individual, in a group, or with family members. There can also be a combination of these.
- **Social support** is very important. Home and social relationships have a direct impact on a person's choices and mood. Clients are given support to strengthen relationships and help take away behavior that can be harmful.

- Programs **view recovery as a long-term, community-based process**. Improvement is slow even with a consistent treatment program. This service can take months or years to prevent a person from going back to severe symptoms of their mental illness.
- These programs that work with substance abuse and mental illness are **comprehensive**. They think about a number of different things in life that can help improve someone's mental health such as: stress management, social networks, jobs, housing and activities. These programs see that substance abuse is connected with mental illness. They are not 2 separate issue, and so the program helps to resolve both illnesses together, at the same time.
- Programs have **cultural sensitivity**. Those that do not have equal access to resources, such as LGBTQ+, BIPOC, the homeless, and other people who are in a more vulnerable position, can benefit from this service because it can be shaped around their needs.