

Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed

One thought-provoking method to raise awareness about *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)* is writing an “opposite editorial,” or “op-ed.” An op-ed gives you the opportunity to address important issues related to substance use disorder treatment, recovery, and the reintegration of people in recovery into society. You also can showcase this year’s theme, *“Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars.”* Writing an op-ed turns you into a columnist, allowing you to express your views and present the important facts about the value of investing in treatment services.

“Op-Eds”: Compelling and Expressive

“Opposite Editorial” or “Op-Ed” = A section of a newspaper that includes a page of opinion columns and letters located opposite the editorial page. Op-eds generally present personal viewpoints, supported by facts and figures.

- **Develop an outline** to help you stay focused and to act as a reminder to cover the key points.
- **Express your opinion** in a straightforward manner from the very beginning of the piece.
- **Focus on a single topic**, as this will more effectively persuade the readers and keep their attention focused on the most important issues.
- **Keep it simple** by using short but compelling words. Most newspapers are written for readers at a fifth-grade level. Also, less is more: do not write more than 600 words.
- **Provide background information**; do not presume that readers are aware of how the issue affects your local community.
- **Support your position** with statistics or study results—they add credibility to your argument. However, try not to overwhelm readers with numbers, because it will bury the story.
- **Use anecdotes** that give meaning to your op-ed. Reference a recent local or national news event, or even a personal story, to bring your piece to life.
- **Request a quote** from a *Recovery Month* planning partner from your state or local area. You also can include a relevant quote from another local authority or expert. See the list of *Recovery Month* partners included in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit.
- **Identify yourself** at the end of the op-ed by including in italics your full name, daytime phone number, e-mail address, and a brief description of who you are and what you do that makes you an expert on the subject that you are writing about.

Resources to help you write your op-ed include:

- **The op-ed template** at the end of this document, which can be adapted to fit your needs. Make sure you edit the placeholders in the brackets as necessary. Electronic versions of these materials and other templates are available on the *Recovery Month* Web site, www.recoverymonth.gov.
- **Local information**, which you can obtain by contacting the Single-State Agency (SSA) in your state. Refer to the SSA Directory in the “Resources” section of this toolkit. Additionally, state-specific treatment information can be found in the *Treatment Episode Data Set* at www.dasis.samhsa.gov/webt/NewMapv1.htm, as well as from the *National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services*. Information on treatment facilities in your area can be found at www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.
- **The 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings**, published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This survey includes state-related information and can be found on SAMHSA's Web site at www.oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh.htm.

Submitting Your Op-Ed

- **Start early** when submitting to your local newspaper, because many papers receive up to 500 submissions per week. Call the paper about two months before *Recovery Month* kicks off and ask for the name of the editorial page editor. Then contact that person to introduce yourself and your issue.
- **Practice before calling** and know exactly what you will say. Tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed during *Recovery Month* in September, and ask about any specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines). Also ask for tips that would help ensure placement, such as specific topics related to substance use disorders that would be of interest to their readers.
- **Be respectful of the editor's time** when you call. Take only a few minutes introducing yourself and explaining the issue.
- **Adapt to the editor's preferences** for receiving an op-ed submission. Many prefer submissions via e-mail or fax, although some may ask you to send it via U.S. mail. Following their preferences will increase the chances of getting your op-ed placed.
- **Include a cover letter** that briefly reminds the editor who you are when you send your op-ed, referencing any previous contact you may have had. Highlight why the subject is of importance to the newspaper's readers—clearly and concisely.

- **Provide background information on *Recovery Month*** so that the editor knows why the op-ed is timely to print in September.
- **Place a follow-up call** approximately a week after submitting your op-ed to give time for the editor to review it. Confirm that the op-ed was received and answer any questions.

Share Your Activities and Successes

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month 2007* with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. By sharing your planning and activities, you are helping to generate momentum, thereby increasing outreach efforts to touch millions of lives that are affected by substance use disorders.

You also can share community success stories and other outreach efforts during *Recovery Month* by completing the Customer Satisfaction Form in this planning toolkit. Instructions are included on the form.

Please send samples of your organization's *Recovery Month* promotional materials to: Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically at the *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit the Web site or call 1-800-662-HELP. For additional information about substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, please visit SAMHSA's Web site at www.samhsa.gov.

APPROXIMATELY 585 WORDS: PLEASE ADAPT AS NEEDED.

[Date]

FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL BENEFITS OF TREATMENT AND RECOVERY FROM SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

Investing in treatment for substance use disorders is necessary to ensure the health and well-being of our community. Research shows that substance use disorders are medical conditions. In fact, treatments for drug use disorders are just as effective as treatments for other chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure, asthma, and diabetes.

More than 72 medical conditions have risk factors that can be attributed to substance use. Investing in treatment programs for people with substance use disorders can prevent the onset of long-term medical conditions, ultimately saving lives and decreasing long-term costs.

However, nearly 21 million Americans needed but did not receive treatment for alcohol or drug use in 2005, and interestingly, almost 77 percent of adults classified with substance dependence or abuse were employed. Many people may not realize that investing in treatment saves money for businesses and the community in the long run. For example, treatment is cost effective, with some measurements showing a benefit-to-cost ratio of up to 7:1, with substance use disorder treatment costing \$1,583 per person on average and having a monetary benefit to society of nearly \$11,487 for each person treated.

Investing in treatment can have significant effects on employment and the viability of employers and businesses in the community. Treatment is associated with a 19-percent increase in employment and an 11-percent decrease in the number of clients who receive welfare. Reported job problems, including incomplete work, absenteeism, tardiness, work-related injuries, mistakes, and disagreements with supervisors, are cut by an average of 75 percent among employees who have received treatment for substance use disorders.

Combined data from 2004 and 2005 state that among people who needed treatment for a substance use disorder, didn't receive it at a specialty facility, and felt they needed it, 35 percent said they did not receive it because of cost and insurance barriers. These statistics apply to [city or region] as well. In [state], [number] people suffer from substance use disorders, and countless numbers of those are unable to receive the same health care options as someone with other chronic disorders, such as diabetes.

We owe it to our family, friends, and community to support treatment and recovery as effective ways to address substance use disorders. Employers, insurers, and the decision makers of [city/state] need to understand the financial impact substance use disorders have on our community and the need to provide access to treatment and recovery support for those who need it.

When doors are open to recovery, more people will seek treatment for substance use disorders to reclaim their lives and health and to reintegrate into the community. For example, [name of facility] in [city] works to inform our residents of the importance of treatment and encourages people to share their personal stories of having a substance use disorder and the benefits of recovery.

To promote the hopeful and healing message of recovery, [organization name] is participating in the 18th annual observance of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**, a nationwide initiative every September supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. [Organization name] is holding a variety of exciting and educational events this month to coincide with this year's **Recovery Month** theme: **"Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars."** The events in [city/state] include: [briefly list events/activities].

By participating in **Recovery Month**, you are supporting those already in recovery and encouraging those in need of help to seek treatment. Learning about these issues will make it easier to break down barriers to treatment, and you will be investing in the best interests of our community.

[Your full name] is [insert your title/affiliation or other role in the substance use disorder field].