

## PRESS MATERIALS FOR YOUR RECOVERY MONTH EVENT

Creating and distributing press materials, such as a media advisory or press release, provides positive publicity for your **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** activities. Use these materials to garner media coverage that highlights that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and/or substance use disorders.

For 23 years, **Recovery Month**, sponsored by the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#), within the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#), has celebrated the millions of Americans in recovery.

This year's **Recovery Month** theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. The theme also highlights that people in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities. They also prove to others that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover.

Use this document as a guide on how to develop and distribute publicity materials to promote your **Recovery Month** events this September.

### *Draft...*

When you begin creating your press materials to publicize your **Recovery Month** event, keep in mind that it's important to emphasize that this is part of a national observance. Highlight this year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** in your materials and include information about people in recovery from mental and/or substance use disorders and their family and friends within the community. Lastly, recognize those who work in the prevention, treatment, and recovery field, as they play a role in empowering these individuals to take the first step and embark on a path of recovery.

You may wonder if your **Recovery Month** event will be considered newsworthy to reporters. To increase interest, consider the following suggestions:

- Plan an event where a proclamation is issued by a local official or lawmaker;
- Honor a local individual or organization;
- Launch a new public education program; and
- Conduct a seminar or workshop featuring a local celebrity speaker.

For additional newsworthy event ideas, visit the **"Promote Recovery Month with Events"** document in this toolkit.



# Media Outreach

There are several types of materials your organization can share with the media to publicize your **Recovery Month** event. A media advisory, press release, and backgrounder all effectively share timely information with reporters. Remember that the type of format you may use to share information with media outlets for one event may be different from what you might share for another event. For example, it may be best to send a media advisory and backgrounder for a smaller event, while a well-attended rally may require a press release. Regardless of which materials you use, each tool outlined below will encourage the media to cover your event, ultimately creating community interest.

- **Media advisories, or media alerts**, are brief one-page documents that inform local media outlets about an upcoming event that may be of interest. Advisories provide reporters with the basics – just enough information so that they are curious and want to attend your event to learn more. In addition, they should:
  - Have a similar format as an event invitation by outlining who will be attending or participating in the event, what attendees can expect to see or do, where the event will be held, and when it will take place. Also, share whether photo opportunities will be available and how reporters can schedule interviews with spokespeople if they are interested.
  - Include the contact information for your organization or someone from the event planning committee so that reporters can request further details.

For optimal success, send your advisory to the calendar editor and the health reporter or editor who covers local news or events at your local newspaper.

- **Press releases, or news releases**, are lengthier than media advisories. They typically are one- to two-page announcements, read like condensed news stories, and are sent to the media to encourage them to cover your organization's event or news. While some smaller newspapers may run your release word for word, the majority of media outlets use them as background information to craft their own article or broadcast segment. Press releases should:
  - Be approximately 500 words in length, formatted in short paragraphs;
  - Contain the most important information at the top, followed by supporting details later in the article; and
  - Include a quote from your organization's spokesperson or your event's keynote speaker. If you are partnering with another organization, it's acceptable to have more than one person quoted in the release.
- **Backgrounders** are succinct documents that often accompany a media advisory or news release, and supply additional information on the subject. They also can be distributed to the media or other attendees at your **Recovery Month** event. Refer to the sample backgrounder at the end of this document that you can distribute as-is, or you can tweak the backgrounder to include specific information on the history of your event or organization. It may be helpful to format your backgrounder in an easy-to-read question and answer format, outlining frequently asked questions that you receive. The backgrounder could highlight:
  - SAMHSA and **Recovery Month**;
  - Your organization;
  - Your specific **Recovery Month** event;
  - Recent data on mental and/or substance use disorders nationwide and in your community;
  - Relevant information on prevention, treatment, and recovery support services; and
  - Local individuals in recovery.

# Media Outreach

Use the sample media advisory, press release, and backgrounder templates at the end of this document, and modify them to support your **Recovery Month** event. Use either your organization's letterhead or the **Recovery Month** letterhead found at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> for your press materials.

In addition to the tools outlined above, use the following materials to raise awareness about the prevalence of mental and/or substance use disorders in your area and the need for prevention, treatment, and recovery support services:

**Op-eds** are commonly placed on the page opposite the editorial page in newspapers. Op-eds offer a strong position on a topic, generally authored by an expert in the industry or subject area. Their purpose is to influence public opinion and create a dialogue among the community about a specific issue, such as mental and/or substance use disorders or recovery. Refer to the "**Share Your Voice During Recovery Month**" document in this toolkit for further information on how to draft and submit an op-ed to your local newspaper.

- **Letters to the editor**, sometimes abbreviated as LTEs, are short notes sent to a publication to express a point of view on a relevant, timely issue. LTEs are most frequently published in newspapers and newsmagazines; however, some radio or television stations also air these letters. You can write letters as a response to a news story that was recently published or to highlight a newsworthy issue, such as the importance of funding community treatment resources in light of recent developments.
- **Public service announcements, or PSAs**, are informational commercials that local radio or television outlets play at no cost to the distributor. Every year, SAMHSA creates and distributes radio and television PSAs in English and Spanish to educate individuals in need of treatment and recovery support services that recovery is possible and help is available.

## Customize...

Share **Recovery Month's** key message – that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and/or substance use disorders – with your supporters. To ensure the public understands that it is essential to combat these prevalent yet serious conditions, communicate the goals of your **Recovery Month** event and how you hope to involve and/or change your local community. Remember to share these messages with all members of your event-planning committee, so that anyone can offer a relevant quote if asked by the media. It may be helpful to review the "**Work with the Media**" document in this toolkit as a group to ensure that all individuals can provide accurate statistics and details surrounding the event.

When developing your press materials, keep in mind the following tips:

- **Be cautious of language:** Avoid using slang terms that may offend someone in recovery or technical jargon that the general public may not understand. Remember that this is a sensitive topic for many individuals across the United States.
- **Check for accuracy:** Be sure to double-check the names, titles, and contact information in your materials and verify that all statistics and spellings are correct.
- **Write factually:** Except when writing an op-ed, only express opinions in direct quotes citing a specific individual as the source. Remember to get consent from the individual quoted before distributing your materials.

# Media Outreach

In addition, work to incorporate the following messages into your materials, which pertain to both the general **Recovery Month** observance and this year's theme, "**Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It**":

- **Recovery Month** is an initiative sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**. The observance, celebrated each September for the past 23 years, honors individuals in recovery, their families and friends who have supported them during their journey, and those who work in the prevention, treatment, and recovery support services field.
- Mental and/or substance use disorders can affect anyone – regardless of race, age, gender, geographic region, or socioeconomic level – but for all individuals, prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover. It's essential to recognize the value of recovery for individuals, families, and the larger community.
- Visit the **Recovery Month** website at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> and visit [insert organization's website] for detailed information on mental and/or substance use disorders and prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. For specific information on local treatment options, call SAMHSA's National Helpline at **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**, or **1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, for 24-hour free and confidential information in English and Spanish. You can also visit SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>.

In addition, use the following resources to customize your press materials with local data that may be available:

- Single-State Agency Directory (SSA)
- SAMHSA's *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*
- SAMHSA's *National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings*
- SAMHSA's National Survey on Substance Abuse Treatment Services (N-SSATS)
- SAMHSA's Treatment Episode Data Set
- SAMHSA Regional Offices

## Disseminate...

Now that you've drafted your media materials, it's important to effectively distribute these resources. Before you distribute your media advisory, release, or backgrounder, refer to the checklist below:

- Does the tool highlight the importance of **Recovery Month**?
- Does the event entail a "call to action" for the media and/or the community?
- Does any information included need further explanation?
- Do I know the most appropriate person and outlet to send my materials?
- Do the materials provide community-specific information that localizes it?

To learn more about where to send your materials and how to build a robust media list, refer to the "**Work with the Media**" document in this toolkit.

# Media Outreach

Press materials are most commonly distributed electronically. Reporters receive hundreds of emails each week, and often do not open emailed attachments. To ensure a reporter sees the information you send, copy and paste your materials into the body of an email. Make sure they can clearly see the headline and first paragraph even if they don't scroll down. Also, personalize each email so the reporter knows it's not a mass message, and you are familiar with their work. For example, if you've had a previous conversation with the reporter, you may want to mention this at the beginning of your note to trigger their memory. Additionally, mention a story the reporter recently wrote that caught your eye and provide a few thoughts on the topic discussed.

Now that you know how to send your press materials, when is the best time to send them? **Media advisories** are typically sent to reporters about a week in advance of an event. Remember that these alerts serve as an invitation or "save-the-date" card for your event.

On the other hand, **press releases** are distributed either directly before or at the event. Sometimes reporters are on a tight deadline and may ask for the "embargoed" release in advance of the event. This implies that journalists will honor your request to publish the story after your event or official announcement time, even though they have the information in advance. As an example, you may distribute the keynote speech to be given at your event to reporters a day in advance, with an agreement they will not publish any information on the speech until noon the following day, after the speech has been given.

If you'd like to distribute your press materials to a large number of recipients, you may wish to use an online distribution service. Some of these services may charge a small fee, so it's important to research each method before committing to one service. Additionally, if you're a nonprofit organization, some of these companies may offer their services to you at a discounted rate. Media distribution sites include:

- *24/7 Press Release*
- *Business Wire*
- *PR Log*
- *PR Newswire*

Once you have distributed your materials to the media, remember to post the materials on the **Recovery Month** website at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov> and on your own organization's site. By doing so, you can reach a much larger audience and increase attendance at your event. It's also important that you follow up with each reporter to whom you sent your materials, to ensure they received them and gauge their interest in attending your event or scheduling an interview with someone from your organization. Refer to the "**Work with the Media**" document in this toolkit for tips on pitching and advice on communicating with journalists.

## Share...

As discussed in the "**Promote Recovery Month with Events**" document in this toolkit, it's important to evaluate your event after it has taken place. As a planning committee, recognize each other's successes and brainstorm things you may wish to do differently for future events.

# Media Outreach

You can promote your organization's event and the message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover by following these suggestions:

- Post your press materials on the **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, to accompany your event listing;
- Share your event information through **Recovery Month** social media outlets such as the **Facebook** page, **YouTube** channel, and **Twitter** accounts;

Tell us about your outreach efforts and which toolkit materials you found useful during **Recovery Month** by completing the "**Customer Satisfaction Form**;" and

- Send a copy of your published op-ed and placement information electronically to [recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov](mailto:recoverymonth@samhsa.hhs.gov) or by mail to:

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
ATTN: Consumer Affairs/**Recovery Month**  
Center for Substance Abuse Treatment  
1 Choke Cherry Road  
Rockville, MD 20857

## Consult Resources...

For more information on **Recovery Month** and services available to those in need, please refer to the following resources:

- **SAMHSA's National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, provides 24-hour, free and confidential information about mental and/or substance use disorders and prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English or Spanish.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**, provides a free, 24-hour helpline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.
- **SAMHSA's "Find Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment" website**, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, contains information about treatment options and special services located in your area.
- The **Recovery Month** website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, contains all the materials from this toolkit and a wide variety of relevant resources.

**Inclusion of websites and event examples in this document and on the *Recovery Month website* does not constitute official endorsement by the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* or the *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*.**

## SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

[Adapt as needed for your event by modifying the type of event, date, etc.]

### [Name of Local Official] to Issue Proclamation and Lead *Recovery Walk* to Raise Awareness of Mental and/or Substance Use Disorders

According to recent data released by the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#), in 2010, 2.6 million people aged 12 or older who needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem received treatment at a specialty facility in the past year, and an estimated **XX [thousand/million]** people in **[city or state]** are affected by these conditions. Also, 31.3 million adults aged 18 or older received mental health services during the past 12 months, and an estimated **XX [thousand/million]** people in **[city or state]** are affected by these conditions. This is an all-too-common problem, and it's imperative that individuals in **[City or State]** understand that the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable.

To address the problem, **[Name of local official]** will be signing a proclamation to honor **National Recovery Month** this September to raise awareness that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and/or substance use disorders. Additionally, **[Name of expert]** will discuss local mental and/or substance use disorders and provide details on available services.

Last year, 164 proclamations were issued nationwide, including one by the President of the United States. The signing of the proclamation is part of the 23rd observance of **Recovery Month**, sponsored by SAMHSA. After the signing of the proclamation, attendees and all citizens of **[City]** are encouraged to join a *Recovery Walk* around the community to highlight the significance of helping people in need of treatment and recovery support services, while also celebrating the accomplishments of individuals in recovery.

**WHO:** [Participants]

**WHEN:** [Date and Time]

**WHERE:** [Address of Location]

**CONTACT:** [Name and Phone Number of Primary Contact for Event]



## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

[Adapt as needed for your event by modifying the type of event, date, and local statistics as available.]

### For Immediate Release

**Contact:** [Name of person who is available to answer questions from the media]  
[Phone number of contact person – include office and cell numbers]  
[Email address of contact person]

### [Name of Local Official] Issues Proclamation and Hosts Recovery Walk to Raise Awareness About Mental and/or Substance Use Disorder Support Services in [City or State]

[City, State], [Date] – Mental and/or substance use disorders are a critical challenge that [City or State] must address immediately, according to [Name of local official], who today proclaimed September as **National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)**. To draw attention to the issue, [Name of local official] led a *Recovery Walk* around the community to raise awareness about people in need of treatment and recovery support services. The walk, which was attended by more than [number of people who attended the walk] people, drew support from many individuals in recovery, as well as their friends and families.

"My hope is that through these activities, people will recognize that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable," stated [Name of local official]. "As you know, mental and/or substance use disorders not only affect those who are suffering, but also their families, friends, and the larger community. This underscores how crucial it is to provide access to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services."

[Replace the following paragraph with local statistics, if available.] In 2010, 31.3 million people aged 18 or older (13.7 percent of the U.S. population) received mental health services according to the **2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health**, an annual survey released by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**. In 2010, 2.6 million people aged 12 or older (1.0 percent of the U.S. population) who needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem received specialty treatment at a specialty facility in the past year. .

To showcase these issues' impact on the local community, the five-mile *Recovery Walk* processed throughout downtown [City], gaining support of local businesses and organizations. While many participants had previously planned on walking in the event, several bystanders joined in throughout it to support the cause.

"Seeing people of all ages and from all walks of life join together for a common cause was extraordinary," said [name of person], a walk participant who has been in recovery for [number of years in recovery] years. "Through each event, each proclamation issued, and each **Recovery Month** observance, more people across the United States will be able to embrace recovery."



# Media Outreach

Today's event was part of a national initiative sponsored by SAMHSA, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**. The observance of **Recovery Month**, which takes place each September, raises awareness of mental and/or substance use disorders, celebrates individuals in long-term recovery, and acknowledges the work of prevention, treatment, and recovery service providers. Each September, and throughout the year, **Recovery Month** encourages communities nationwide to spread the message that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people can recover from mental and/or substance use disorders.

## SAMPLE BACKGROUND

[Adapt as needed by including additional information on your specific organization, event, etc.]

### *National Recovery Month Media Fact Sheet*

#### **What is National Recovery Month?**

**National Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** is an annual observance celebrated each September since 1989. In September and throughout the year, **Recovery Month** spreads the message that:

- Prevention works;
- Treatment is effective; and
- People recover from mental and/or substance use disorders.

Refer to the Recovery Month website, <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>, for additional information on the initiative.

#### **Who sponsors Recovery Month?**

**Recovery Month** is sponsored by the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**, within the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**.

#### **What is this year's Recovery Month theme?**

This year's theme, **"Join the Voices for Recovery: It's Worth It,"** emphasizes that while the road to recovery may be difficult, the benefits of preventing and overcoming mental and/or substance use disorders are significant and valuable to individuals, families, and communities. People in recovery achieve healthy lifestyles, both physically and emotionally, and contribute in positive ways to their communities.

#### **What events occur during Recovery Month?**

Throughout September, hundreds of events occur nationwide to celebrate **Recovery Month**. These events – ranging from recovery walks and rallies to online web chats and small-group barbecues – encourage the following audiences to address the continued need for prevention, treatment, and recovery support services:

- Active military and veterans;
- Justice system personnel;
- Communities;
- Educators;



# Media Outreach

- Employers;
- Civic leaders;
- Faith-based organizations;
- Recovery community;
- Friends and family members;
- Social service organizations; and
- Prevention, treatment, and recovery organizations.

## Where can people find treatment for mental and/or substance use disorders?

Many treatment options exist. SAMHSA's treatment website, <http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment>, offers more than 11,000 specialized facilities in the United States that provide rehabilitation services, behavioral therapy, counseling, and medication support, among many other services. SAMHSA's National Helpline, **1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or **1-800-487-4889 (TDD)**, provides 24-hour, free and confidential information about mental and/or substance use disorders, and prevention, treatment, and recovery referrals in English and Spanish. Additionally, the "**Treatment and Recovery**" document in the **Recovery Month** toolkit provides an overview of support options that exist.

## Where can I learn more about the current mental health and substance use landscape?

Refer to the "**Fast Facts**" document in the **Recovery Month** toolkit for up-to-date statistics on the prevalence of mental and/or substance use disorders in the United States.