

Substance Abuse in Montgomery County What Should We Do To Address This Problem?

In 2012, Montgomery County was given a “Top 25%” overall priority drug problem rating based on comparisons with all Indiana counties. Specifically, we rated in the top 25% of counties for marijuana, heroin, and cocaine use and arrests, and we rated in the top 50% for methamphetamine and prescription

drugs. Of the 357 admissions for substance abuse treatment in our county in 2012, 75.5% were documented as abusing two or three substances simultaneously.

You are likely attending this forum because you have seen the effects of substance abuse in our community. This forum is meant to be an opportunity for our community to come together and consider this problem with fresh eyes and fresh ideas.

Issue Snapshot

* Our community recognizes substance abuse as a problem. Over 70% (>870) of respondents for the 2012 Community Health Needs Assessment for Montgomery County named substance abuse programs as among the very top personal or community needs in Montgomery County.

* According to Chief Probation Officer Kalay Colley, approximately 80% of adult cases at the Montgomery County Probation Office per year are due to a substance or alcohol abuse offense or the offender was under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time they committed the offense. That translates into about 560 adult cases. In 2012, 60% of juvenile cases were referred to the probation office for alcohol, tobacco or another drug offense.

* According to the 2012 Indiana State Epidemiological Profile Report:

-In 2012, the Indiana State Police seized 27 methamphetamine labs in Montgomery County

-In 2012, there were 48 prescription drug overdose deaths in Montgomery County

* Substance abuse affects all kinds of people in our community. According to addictions therapist Jamie Sweet Douglas, substance abuse “is an equal opportunity life destroyer. It does not discriminate based on socioeconomic status, race, age, or gender.” Based on her observations, well-educated and wealthier substance abusers are likely better at hiding their addiction.

* Montgomery County Sherriff Mark Casteel suggested in an October 2012 *Crawfordsville Journal Review* article that prescription drug abuse is a problem for the whole community: “In Montgomery County, we are working to address this problem, but we need more people to work together to fight prescription drug abuse,” Casteel said. “We need more eyes and ears.”

Three approaches to solving the problem of substance abuse that we will explore:

Approach 1: We should build and protect a safe community by strengthening efforts that identify and punish drug offenders.

Approach 2: We should develop the knowledge, habits, and community assets to prevent substance abuse in the first place.

Approach 3: We should enable people who struggle with substance abuse to receive the treatment and help necessary to recover from addiction and re-enter the community as productive members.

Approach 1: Build a Safe Community

This approach emphasizes strengthening efforts to identify and punish drug offenders in order to build and protect a safe community.



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Relevant Facts and Observations:

* According to the Justice Center Council of State Governments in a 2010 report, the average drug sentence is 96 months, or 8 years.

* As of October 10, 2013, more than 45% of the 204 inmates at the Montgomery County prison have current drug or alcohol related charges. This does not include violators of parole, who may have past drug or alcohol related charges.

* Informal law enforcement statistics cited in the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute's 2013 Montgomery County Comprehensive Community Plan stated that in 2012, there were 708 arrests related to drugs or alcohol: 22% related to marijuana, 67% related to illegal use of alcohol, and 58% involving illegal drugs.

Examples of What Might Be Done

1. Give offenders fewer opportunities to avoid jail time.
2. Implement more frequent drug testing and/or locker checks in middle and high schools.
3. Encourage college students to check IDs and hire bouncers for large events/parties.
4. Create community-led neighborhood watches.
- 5.

Potential Concerns with this Approach

1. Jail time for "light" substance abusers makes them better criminals because they associate with worse offenders.
2. Might need additional tax revenue to fund increased law enforcement efforts.
3. Limits the civil liberties of citizens.
4. Severe crackdown stigmatizes and shames offenders, hampering their treatment efforts.
- 5.

Example Tradeoffs/Questions

- Would you support stronger tracking and testing even if you or your child must comply?
- Would you support a greater law enforcement presence even if that required paying higher taxes?
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Approach 2: Prevent Abuse

This approach emphasizes developing the knowledge, habits, and community assets to prevent substance abuse in the first place.



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Relevant Facts and Observations:

* “The best prevention is being involved with your kids and educated about what drugs they may come across,” said Denim Zachary, youth speaker for the A.H.E.A.D. Coalition. “It’s equally important to let your kids know you won’t tolerate alcohol or substance abuse of any kind and set clear consequences.” (*Crawfordsville Journal Review, December 21, 2012*)

* According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, it is estimated that 50% of the mentally ill population also has a substance abuse problem.



Examples of What Might Be Done

1. Educate community about dangers of addiction and abuse. Particularly target students and their parents. Include Wabash students.
2. Improve social services, such as providing a free or low-cost recreation place for youth and families or increase free mental health clinics
3. Have local newspapers occasionally publish statistics of the number of county residents who die from substance abuse and which substances
4. Identify and address root causes of substance abuse in Montgomery County
- 5.

Potential Concerns with this Approach

1. Most of these ideas cost money. Who will pay?
2. The impact of preventative efforts cannot be determined.
3. Substance abuse education for kids creates exposure to drugs and alcohol and invades parental authority.
4. A space for youth would require some type of supervision.
- 5.

Example Tradeoffs/Questions

- Would you favor preventative messages from the community even if they differ from the ways you would approach these issues as a parent?
- Would you support free or low-cost spaces or programs for youth or adults even if you never benefitted personally?
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Approach 3: Enable Treatment and Recovery

This approach emphasizes enabling people who struggle with substance abuse to receive the treatment and help necessary to recover from addiction and re-enter the community as productive members.



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Relevant Facts and Observations:

- * There is no in-patient treatment center in our county, but there are a variety of out-patient centers, therapists, and support groups.
- * People who seek substance abuse therapy typically must pay for the classes/sessions, even when court-ordered. Insurance is often required.
- * According to addictions therapist Jamie Sweet Douglas, the recidivism rate for substance abuse is 40-60%, and a drug addict typically relapses seven times on their way to recovery.
- * The Montgomery County Probation Office now offers a drug court program, which focuses on rehabilitation and treatment.

Examples of What Might Be Done

1. Provide funding for substance abuse therapy classes/sessions.
2. Educate businesses and community about abuse and recovery.
3. Offer a support group for family members (parents, spouses and children) of substance abusers.
4. Create a free, non-faith based sober living home.
- 5.

Potential Concerns with this Approach

1. Keeps abusers on the street longer.
2. Most of these ideas cost money. Who will pay?
3. In most cases, therapy hasn't been proven to help a person fully recover from substance abuse.
4. Treatment has a chance only if other factors in a person's environment are improved.
- 5.

Example Tradeoffs/Questions

- Would you support programs to help recovering addicts even if you knew they are likely to relapse?
- Would you support the use of community resources to provide free or low-cost, non-faith based treatment options even if you personally believe that spirituality is a key to recovery?
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