

# Substance Abuse Prevention in Managed Care: A Missing Ingredient for Better Health

By Jody K. Vilschick

Closing the Gap, Substance Abuse Prevention: What's Working to Keep Our Youth Drug Free?  
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Where is substance abuse prevention in managed care? Although managed care promotes preventive health care services (e.g., immunizations, mammograms, and other screenings), prevention efforts to curtail substance abuse are often a missing ingredient.

"We shouldn't think of 'managed care' versus 'substance abuse prevention' programs," says Sheri Rucker, public health analyst for the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's Office of Managed Care (OMC), a part of HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "We should think of integrating prevention strategies into the managed care system. No one is disputing that managed care 'treats' substance abuse, but efforts to stop drug abuse before it starts is often viewed as a foreign concept in these organizations," Rucker added.

OMC's training program, *Preventive Interventions: Roles in a Changing Health Care System*, brings together the best of today's scientific knowledge about what works in prevention. "This program brings health care professionals, including representatives from the managed care industry, educators, prevention professionals, and even consumers to the table to establish a dialog about what works, and how they can work together to get results," says Rucker.

OMC's 13 training modules demonstrate the collaboration of managed care with substance abuse prevention organizations. Each module requires the use of three trainers, and always includes at least one expert in substance abuse prevention and one expert in managed care.

The following are just a sample of the training modules now available:

- **Access to Health Care Systems for Vulnerable Populations** demonstrates how effective, culturally sensitive interventions for substance abuse and mental health problems in managed care organizations should be implemented with vulnerable populations.
- **Marketing Strategies to Address Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems in Managed Care Organizations** provides a basic understanding of marketing, especially to applying these concepts to increase substance abuse services in managed care organizations.

- **Community Assessment Tool: An Analysis of "Readiness" to Work with Managed Care Organizations** helps participants develop a realistic plan to partner with managed care organizations to provide culturally sensitive prevention services.
- **Educating and Empowering Consumers to Access Managed Care Systems** provides a review of what consumer education entails.
- **Showcase of Substance Abuse Prevention in Managed Care** highlights substance abuse prevention programs that are promising collaborations between community-based and managed care organizations.

How can minority communities benefit from these training modules? Simply stated—empowerment. For example, the training on consumer education is important because "In it, we emphasize the role consumers have in demanding substance abuse preventive services as part of a wellness menu," said Simmie Marie Davis, MSW, executive director for the Hitchcock Center for Women, a full-service chemical dependency treatment center for women ages 18 and older, and their children up to age 3, in Cleveland, OH.

Davis has seen how important consumer education can be in her work for the Hitchcock Center. "People of color are often the last to receive intervention on all of the major diseases and risk factors. By the time they enter a doctor's office, the disease has likely progressed. Arming minority communities with this valuable information will help develop policy—both on the local and state levels—to advocate for substance abuse education," she added.

OMC plans to increase the training's accessibility to Hispanic minorities by translating them into Spanish. "We're excited about getting these training modules translated," Rucker says. Two modules are already being focus group tested to ensure that the translation is accurate and culturally sensitive. "Our goal is to have the rest of the modules translated by the end of this year," she says.

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