

 **LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF SANTA CRUZ COUNTY**

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UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Santa Cruz County has a drug and alcohol problem. With high rates of use and addiction disorders, the county's ability to treat those suffering from these conditions lags far behind the need for services. Addiction and misuse are treatable disorders, but only if the right kind of treatment is available, and only if those who need it can access it in a timely manner.

In December of 2014, the County Board of Supervisors approved the Health Services Agency's *Strategic Plan for Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Intervention Services*, the first step on a long road to reducing the impact of these disorders on individuals and our community. Along with the approval, the county BOS approved \$1.4 million in increased funding, most of which came from MediCal as a result of the Affordable Care Act, and none of which increased the county budget. Continuation of those funds is now threatened by repeal of the Affordable Care Act. Only about 15% of those with addiction disorders seek treatment; with those funds, the county can offer treatment to slightly less than half of those who seek it. Surely, we can do better.

What barriers do those seeking treatment face? With limited resources available for treatment, those seeking it may be put on long waiting lists, which may discourage many from following through with their treatment. We should also ask why so few of those affected by substance use disorders seek treatment. Many are discouraged by the stigma associated with admitting to such disorders and undergoing treatment. How can our community change the way it looks at such disorders and begin to see them as a condition needing medical treatment rather than a personal failing?

What if more of those who are jailed as punishment for drug- and alcohol-related offenses were ordered by a court to be treated rather than jailed? When a person with an addiction or other substance use disorder is jailed, the costs are high and the end result sees them released untreated, continuing to cost the community in many ways: health care, criminal justice, motor vehicle accidents, property damage. If the money used to incarcerate non-violent offenders were used instead to provide treatment, the end result would be a productive member of society, a safer community, and economic benefits to county citizens.

The Talk About It campaign, created as part of the county's strategic plan, is dedicated to changing the community conversation about substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health disorders to one of compassionate responsiveness. The campaign advocates for treatment, support, and increased understanding about substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorders. Prevention and early intervention are key strategies to reducing the impacts of substance use disorders.

The League of Women Voters supports the Strategic Plan, and has held educational events to help inform the community about this issue. On the League's website (lwvsc.org), articles and videos are available to explore this topic more fully.

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING MORE ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

League of Women Voters of Santa Cruz County lwvscc.org

For an overview of issues about drug and alcohol use in Santa Cruz County, read a report about the County Health Services Agency's strategic planning efforts related to prevention, intervention, and treatment of substance abuse in the October 2014 VOTER newsletter, which can be downloaded at lwvscc.org/voter.

On May 5, 2015, the Santa Cruz County League of Women Voters sponsored an educational forum about substance use disorders. A link to the video of the event can be found at lwvscc.org/videos. A five-part series of articles reporting on the forum was published in our VOTER newsletters (in the August, September, October, and December 2015 and March 2016 issues, available online at lwvscc.org/voter). The entire series can be read in a PDF available on line (a link to the PDF can be found on the video page).

County Resources

The Talk About It campaign educates the community about substance use disorders and provides help and resources for those seeking treatment for themselves or a loved one. The website covers treatment, prevention, and screening, as well as tips on how to start a conversation about substance use disorders. talkaboutitscc.org

211 Santa Cruz County connects people to the assistance they need to address everyday challenges of living as well as those that develop during times of community emergencies. 211 is a 3-digit number that anyone in Santa Cruz county can dial from either their landline or cellphone to get connected to the services they need. 211 is available 24/7 and 354 days. It's free and confidential.

unitedwaysc.org/211-santa-cruz-county

Community Recovery Services (a program offered by Encompass Community Services) provides counseling and treatment services in residential and outpatient settings for individuals and families who experience life difficulties associated with substance abuse. encompasscs.org/CRS

Janus of Santa Cruz offers quality programs that treat over 2,500 clients annually using the full continuum of care for substance use disorder and co-occurring disorder treatment, including detoxification, inpatient and outpatient treatment, perinatal services, DUI education, medication assisted treatment, behavioral health services, and supervised Sober Living Environment (SLE) housing. janussc.org

Sobriety Works is a California state licensed addiction treatment center dedicated to the treatment of adults experiencing substance use disorders in Santa Cruz. With decades of experience, the staff of Sobriety Works offers caring, compassionate and confidential outpatient treatment and sober living environments. sobrietyworks.com

Project CURB is a community outreach initiative started by local teens and adults to reduce binge and underage drinking in Santa Cruz County. Project CURB's goals are to dispel myths about binge drinking, limit youth access to alcohol and to reduce alcohol-related incidents of injury and death by combining media and retailer awareness, policy change and enforcement strategies. Join us in the fight. project-curb.org

Recovery Wave provides information and resources for those who are ready to move towards recovery. santacruzhealth.org/recoverywave