

# Combining Substance Abuse and Employment Services to Address the Opioid Epidemic



The growing opioid crisis has made addressing the economic conditions, treatment and recovery needs of those affected a top priority for policymakers, substance use treatment and employment, program administrators. Abt Associates has a 30-year history of identifying effective programs through research and evaluations. We also provide technical assistance to improve health services to alleviate substance use disorders (SUDs) and employment services to increase skills and boost earnings. Through an interdisciplinary team of workforce development and healthcare experts, we go beyond treatment to improve the long-term economic outcomes of adults and families as they move through recovery.

## Abt Specialties

### Deep Expertise

Extensive knowledge of healthcare systems built on a broad portfolio of opioid-related work with multiple federal and state agencies, including the CDC, SAMHSA, HHS and others

### Cutting Edge Research

Creative and innovative approaches to evaluation design, including quasi-experimental evaluation, randomized controlled trials, predictive analytics and more to identify effective programs and services

### Best Practices

Implementation studies of health and workforce development initiatives and programs that document best practices and lessons for both policymakers and program administrators

### Real World Solutions

Demonstration research projects and pilot tests to measure the impact of various opioid prescription policies and guidelines on patients and providers

### Collaborative Problem Solving

Effective technical assistance to multiple programs and agencies to track service delivery options in SUD and opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment and recovery

### Targeted Dissemination

Collaboration with practitioners and policymakers to ensure results are relevant and widely disseminated to stakeholders and targeted audiences in the field

## Our Work

### Evaluating Innovative Programs Combining SUD Treatment and Recovery Services with Employment Services – Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

#### Building Evidence of Effective Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families

As a subcontractor to MDRC, Abt plays a lead role on the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-

Income Families Study (BEES), a project sponsored by ACF at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The goal: to conduct rigorous evaluations of innovative programs that increase earnings of low-income families and focus on addressing SUDs and/or mental health conditions. Abt leads work on identifying and evaluating programs that blend employment and SUD recovery and treatment services.

## **Prescribing Guidelines, Policy Impact Evaluations, Technical and Implementation Packages**

### **Supporting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Development of Opioid Prescribing Guideline**

Abt provided research and other support for development of the 2016 CDC guideline for prescribing opioids for non-cancer chronic pain outside end-of-life care settings. Abt performed rapid literature reviews, screened studies to identify those meeting research design criteria, synthesized the findings, and provided editorial support for draft clinical recommendations.

### **Supporting Implementation of CDC's Opioid Prescribing Guideline in Healthcare Systems**

In several separately funded projects, Abt and our partners support implementation of the CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain in primary-care practices. As part of those projects, Abt has developed and evaluated several resources for clinicians and systems, including a quality improvement implementation guide and 16 opioid quality improvement (QI) measures that reflect guideline recommendations. Additionally, Abt is supporting a CDC-funded Opioid QI Collaborative of 12 large health systems to implement select recommendations and associated QI measures. Finally, Abt is developing clinical decision support tools embedded in electronic health records to assist clinicians at the point of care in following the CDC guideline recommendations.

### **Development and Evaluation of a Technical Package on Coordinated Care for Chronic Opioid Therapy**

The CDC hired Abt to develop a coordinated care plan for safe opioid prescribing. This included upper-limit dosing thresholds, attention to drug-drug and drug-disease interactions, urine testing for drugs and use of medication-assisted treatment. With MedStar Health, we evaluated the demonstration sites' ability to implement the plan's practices. The guide and other resources are part of the CDC strategy for improving opioid prescription practices.

## **Medication and Medication-Assisted Treatment Educational Materials – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

### **Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health**

Abt supported the development of the first Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health, a seminal project that will have major implications for how the U.S. addresses not only opioid misuse but also public health problems associated with alcohol and other substances. This report provides evidence-based strategies for addressing the opioid epidemic.

## **Service Delivery Improvement: Quality Measures, Service Tools, Service Pilots – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

### **PEP-C**

On behalf of SAMHSA, Abt leads the Program Evaluation for Prevention Contract (PEP-C) to evaluate the Strategic Prevention Framework for Prescription Drugs (SPF-Rx). The SPF-Rx program empowers grantees to use the resources of stakeholders from public health departments to the pharmaceutical industry to reduce prescription drug and illicit opioid misuse and abuse among youth and adults.

### **Coordinate the Development of Innovative Health IT Tools Relevant to Opioid Use Disorder**

Under its Behavioral Health Information Technology Strategy contract, Abt supported SAMHSA in launching technology challenges to spur developers to create solutions that provide additional recovery support to patients receiving outpatient medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder. One app developed can be part of a comprehensive treatment plan that supports access to resources, educational materials, and support for people in outpatient recovery from OUD.

### **Text Message Library for Individuals with Behavioral Health and OUD**

Abt helped SAMHSA develop a text messaging library to support individuals with OUDs. Abt conducted stakeholder interviews with SAMHSA grantees who expressed interest in using text messaging services. We also interviewed subject matter experts with direct experience developing and implementing text messaging libraries and technology-based services for the behavioral health community. Abt developed and tested 150 text messages targeted to individuals in various stages of recovery.

## **Contact Us**

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**Abt Associates** is an engine for social impact, dedicated to moving people from vulnerability to security. Harnessing the power of data and our experts' grounded insights, we provide research, consulting and technical services globally in the areas of health, environmental and social policy, technology and international development.