



**News Release**

**Contact:** Jason Brame (jasonb@communityadvocates.net)

**Phone:** (414) 270-2951

# **MILWAUKEEANS SUPPORT INCREASING ACCESS TO DRUG, ALCOHOL ADDICTION TREATMENT, NEW POLL SHOWS**

## **Broad, Bi-Partisan Support for Treatment Reform Mirrors National Trends**

Milwaukee (Sept. 29, 2009)—A majority of Milwaukeeans supports efforts to make drug and alcohol addiction treatment more accessible for all, and they're willing to pay higher insurance premiums to do so, according to new polling data released by the Milwaukee Addiction Treatment Initiative (MATI), a project of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute.

The poll, conducted by the Washington, D.C. firm Lake Research Partners, shows that 74 percent of Milwaukeeans support increased access to addiction treatment as part of health care reform, including majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans. In addition, 65 percent said that they would pay an increased monthly health care premium—an extra \$2 per month—to ensure everyone had improved access.

This broad, bi-partisan support in Milwaukee mirrors national trends: 77 percent of Americans support including addiction treatment in health reform, 56 percent strongly; and 69 percent of Americans support paying two dollars more per month in health insurance premiums to make addiction treatment more accessible and affordable.

The survey was fielded in Milwaukee Aug. 6-12 by 400 adults age 18 or older; the overall margin of error is +/-5 percent. Complete polling data is available at [www.ca-mati.org](http://www.ca-mati.org).

“Addiction to drugs and alcohol knows no political affiliation; it’s an equal-opportunity disease that can affect any of us, Republican or Democrat, conservative or liberal,” said David Riemer, director of the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute and MATI program director. “In the midst of what has been a contentious debate on health care reform, it’s no surprise that increasing access to treatment for those suffering from the life-threatening disease of addiction has such broad support.”

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Polling results showed that:

- 93 percent agree that Milwaukee County has an alcohol and drug addiction problem.
- 78 percent believe that addiction is a disease, and 74 percent believe that addiction should be treated as a chronic health condition like diabetes or other diseases.
- Three-quarters believe that treatment works to help people overcome addiction.
- Nearly four out of every 10 surveyed believe that treatment improves the health of individuals and families suffering from addiction.

“This polling reveals a high-level of understanding in Milwaukee of the causes of addiction and the effectiveness of treatment to help those suffering from addiction to get well,” said Riemer. “The public no longer accepts outdated attitudes that paint those suffering from addiction as weak-willed, and treatment as an unnecessary luxury for the privileged few. Addiction treatment must be available when and where it is most appropriate to anyone who needs it, and insurance companies must pay for it without artificial limits or excessive cost.”

Nationally, an awareness gap exists around insurance coverage for treatment. While nearly three-quarters (73 percent) think health insurance plans should cover treatment for addiction, nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of insured Americans are not sure whether their plan currently covers treatment services.

Only 26 percent of Americans say there are enough affordable, accessible, quality treatment centers and services in their community, while nearly half—47 percent—reports an inadequate number of treatment centers.

Additionally, 87 percent of Americans see treatment as an ongoing process, sometimes needing more than one period of treatment.

### **Addiction Treatment Gap Affects Public Health and Safety**

Milwaukee suffers from a severe treatment gap. A study by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that in 2004 more than 82,000 people needed but did not receive addiction treatment in Milwaukee County.

This massive gap extends beyond Milwaukee. A federal study found that in 2007, 23.2 million Americans needed treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, but only 10 percent were able to receive it. The vast majority of those who need help are unable to get addiction treatment due to lack of health insurance, inadequate insurance coverage or a lack of treatment services in communities.

Untreated addiction has severe consequences. According to a joint statement of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, each year in Wisconsin drug and alcohol use is responsible for more than 90,000 arrests, 2,100 deaths and \$4.6 billion in associated costs.

## Milwaukee Polling / Add Two

“As a society we are, sadly, all too familiar with the treatment gap, the massive toll it takes and the huge cost it extracts in money and lives,” said Riemer. “But I think we are in the midst of a great movement to close this gap. As health insurance reform progresses, we must continue our work to ensure that the final bill includes a strong addition treatment benefit.”

In June, MATI released polling data that showed three-quarters of Americans know someone personally who has been addicted to alcohol or drugs. Personal experience with addiction spans all demographic groups.

Additionally, half of Americans (49 percent) do not think they would be able to afford the costs of treatment if they or a family member needed it; and three-quarters (75 percent) of Americans are concerned that people who are addicted to alcohol or drugs many not be able to get treatment because they lack insurance coverage or cannot afford it.

MATI, which last year received a grant from the Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap initiative, is a collaboration among more than 80 state and local organizations—including law enforcement, public health organizations, treatment providers and advocates—to expand access to drug and alcohol treatment in Milwaukee County for everyone who needs it.

MATI promotes sweeping change in policy, financing and delivery in order to make addiction treatment available on a parity basis for all those seeking treatment. Community Advocates, Inc. serves as the lead agency for the initiative on behalf of MATI partners: the Benedict Center, City of Milwaukee Health Department, Justice 2000, La Causa, M&S Clinical Services, MICAH, Milwaukee County Department of Health and Social Services, Milwaukee County District Attorney, Wisconsin Department of Corrections, and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.

The **Community Advocates Public Policy Institute** has a clear and simple goal: To explain why so many Milwaukeeans are poor, and to develop and implement a practical strategy to greatly reduce the level of poverty in our community and offer the poor the tools they need to lead better lives.