

**Economic Impact for Bexar County of Untreated Substance Abuse:  
Pay Me Now or Pay Me (a lot more) Later**

**Situation:** There are individuals impacting our medical, mental health and court systems that require substance abuse treatment. Some are addicted to one substance and others are addicted to a substance and may be mentally ill. A majority are homeless and all are unable to pay for services.

**Background:**

Grossly insufficient access to detoxification services for indigent, uninsured and underinsured populations in San Antonio and Bexar County has created a crisis of community wide proportions. Major reasons for this include lack of state and federal funding for treatment and services at both state and local levels; and insufficiently linked and coordinated mental health, substance, health, and criminal justice systems.

Problem: The current patchwork of available community services does not include a complete continuum of care options and does not permit the necessary continuity of care for the effective management of patients.

Identified chemical dependency and alcoholism treatment has been shown to be and is an area of significant need for community resources for those lacking easy access to health care resources. Data suggest significant differences in policies related to admission of unfunded patients needing both psychiatric and chemical dependency treatment which shifts the fiscal burden of care to a few hospitals.

Major barriers to efficient and effective services can be generalized as lack of detoxification and residential services, especially for women with children; lack of standardization for identification,

<b>Bexar County Substance Abuse</b> (Estimate of need & clients served in 2005)		
	Persons in need of SA and in poverty	Unique Treatment Clients Served
Adults (18+)	85,697	3,187
Youths (12-17)	5,925	673
<b>Total</b>	<b>91,622</b>	<b>3,860</b>

residency and income documentation for medical and substance abuse services; fragmentation among portals of entry (e.g., criminal justices, health care, and child protective services) and loss of continuity of care between medical and substance abuse providers resulting in loss to follow-up.

About 50% of individuals with severe mental illnesses are affected by substance abuse. Dual diagnosis is also associated with a host of negative outcomes that may include higher rates of relapse, hospitalization, incarceration, violence, homelessness, and exposure to such serious infections as HIV and hepatitis.

### **Court Cost Associated with Booking**

- As of Jan 2005 an average of 600 cases per month are booked as public intoxicants at the Magistrates Facility
- Each arrest episode/bookings cost \$2, 295 in 1999 dollars. This is the last year for which cost is available.
- At the above rate for 600 cases, average monthly costs exceed \$1,375,000 or \$16,000,000 annually

### **Hospital Related Costs**

- For a one year period of June 2004 to May 2005, 578 indigent pts were served by San Antonio hospitals for Alcohol/Drug Abuse or Dependence at a few San Antonio hospitals.
- Hospital treatment cost for services was over \$5,000,000

**Assessment:** There is insufficient community capacity for detoxification services. The Patrician Movement provides these services, but lacks resources to respond to the magnitude of community needs. Moreover, evidence- based outpatient programs supporting persons after detoxification are not available. These services are necessary to break the frequent repeat cycle of arrest and incarceration or inappropriate admissions to medical facilities.

### **Medical Director's Round**

**Table:** In September 2006, the problem of public intoxicants presenting at the magistrate court level was brought to the attention of the Medical Director's Round Table. Judge John W Bull, Presiding Judge, briefed the group on the following:

1. The problem of public intoxicants seen by the courts;
  - a. Concern about the number of first time offenders
  - b. More concern about the number of chronic offenders recycling through the courts.
2. The obvious need of this population for detoxification services; and the

Facts:

- \* *The Jail Diversion Program requires additional facilities to acutely manage the medical and psychiatric needs of Bexar County residents who may be homeless and who do have substance abuse-related or other mental illnesses.*
- \* *The costs of inpatient hospitalization, intensive day programs, residential or therapeutic communities, or incarceration are very high, and without effective outpatient treatment follow-up, do not constitute sufficient treatment.*
- \* *Effective strategies for addiction treatment include psychotherapy and medication treatment options that are not available through community 12-step programs or self-help groups.*

3. Potential liability for the court holding persons who should be in a detox setting.

**Potential Solution:**

Redesign the community mental health approach to provide an integrated system to:

- 1) Increase the availability of comprehensive substance abuse services;
- 2) Reduce the barriers to service access and motivate treatment compliance;
- 3) Employ evidence-based practices known to be effective; and
- 4) Utilize system tracking mechanisms for clients and outcomes-based assessments of programs to improve the system and support effective treatments.

The fact that the homeless population experiences chronic physical, mental, and substance abuse problems at greater levels than the general population serves to heighten the need for community action.

**Recommendations:** The Medical Directors Roundtable recommends the following.

- 1 Development of a comprehensive plan to integrate existing local initiatives;
- 2 Assessment of existing resources and a feasibility study of integrating local programs and funding;
- 3 A plan to provide access on demand to comprehensive care and services for the homeless. Those services should include:
  - ⇒ Detoxification services
  - ⇒ Day programming
  - ⇒ Partial hospitalization
  - ⇒ Evidenced based outpatient treatment
  - ⇒ Connection to existing services (ensuring integrated continuity of care)

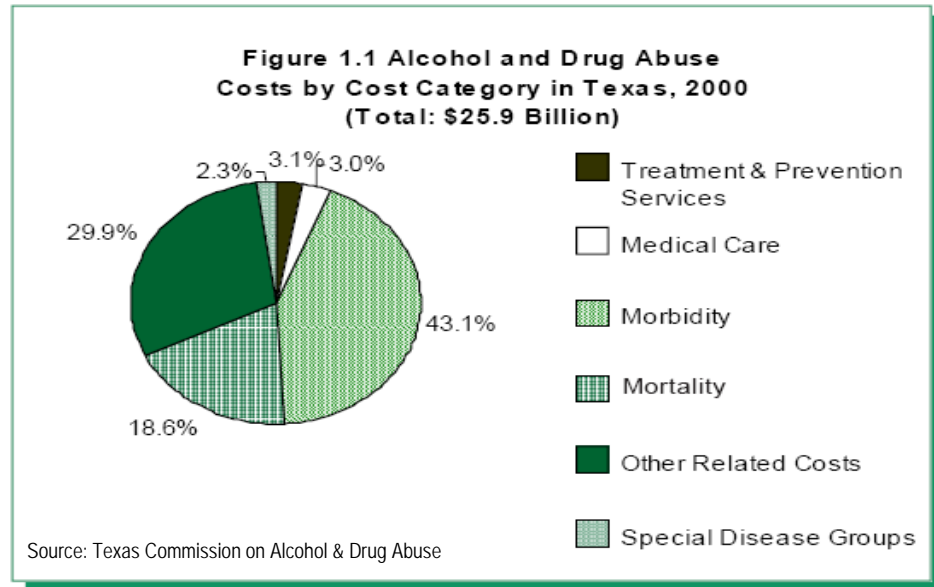
**Conclusion:**

Failure to systematically address these gaps in substance abuse services will assure that the inappropriate and expensive use of local magistrate facilities, jails and emergency rooms continues. Of equal concern is the reduced quality of life in our community and the impact on children.

Children of alcohol or other drug-addicted parents are at increased risk for developing substance abuse and mental health problems.

Current consensus indicates that the economic drain on our community is staggering yet no community wide economic impact estimate combining public and private entities exists.

**Appendix:**



Through important partnerships, our community has made major progress in diverting the mentally ill from local emergency rooms and detention facilities and designed and implemented state of the art trauma systems. Together, we have made a lot of progress. The community and our future generations will benefit greatly from our improvement in access to care.