ADDICTION POLICY FORUM

enCompass: Ohio Pilot Study

Findings on a Novel Intervention for Improving Substance Use Disorder Literacy and Decreasing Stigma

About enCompass

enCompass: A Comprehensive Training on Navigating Addiction is an 8-hour training to increase substance use disorder (SUD) literacy and decrease stigma. The intervention addresses misconceptions and myths about addiction while building SUD literacy -- knowledge and beliefs about substance use disorders to aid their recognition, management and prevention.

Participants learn about signs and symptoms, risk factors, early intervention, evidence-based treatment options and skills to help an individual in need of support.

enCompass was developed by the Addiction Policy Forum with an Expert Review Panel composed of prominent researchers and physicians in the addiction field.

Ohio Pilot

The Addiction Policy Forum in partnership with Governor Mike DeWine's RecoveryOhio Initiative, deployed the enCompass training program in 2021 to more than 800 individuals throughout Ohio.

Locations were selected to prioritize 21 counties in Ohio that experience 80 percent of the overdoses in the state. The project team coordinated with Ohio's county-operated, state supervised behavioral health system made up of area behavioral health authorities to provide 22 trainings.

The evaluation of the Ohio enCompass initiative was conducted by the University of Delaware. This study has been published in the Journal of Addictive Diseases.

Outcomes

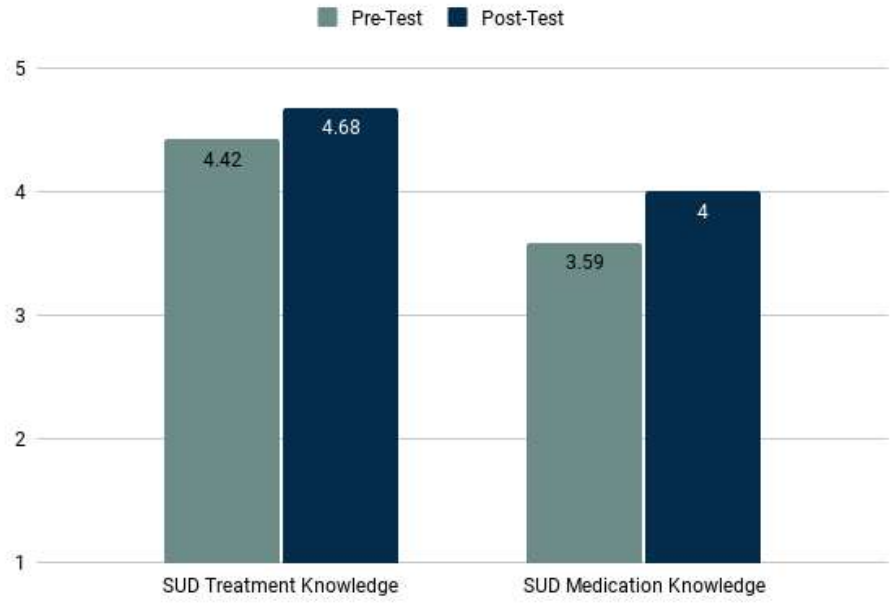
Results from the Ohio pilot study included 492 pre- and post-matched participants.

The evaluation measured addiction knowledge, confidence in how to respond to a substance use disorder (SUD), and levels of stigma, including stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

- Knowledge about addiction increased across the board for all participants, with the most significant improvement among people who entered the training knowing the least about addiction.
- Stigma decreased across the board for all participants, with the greatest decrease among participants with lower knowledge scores on addiction.

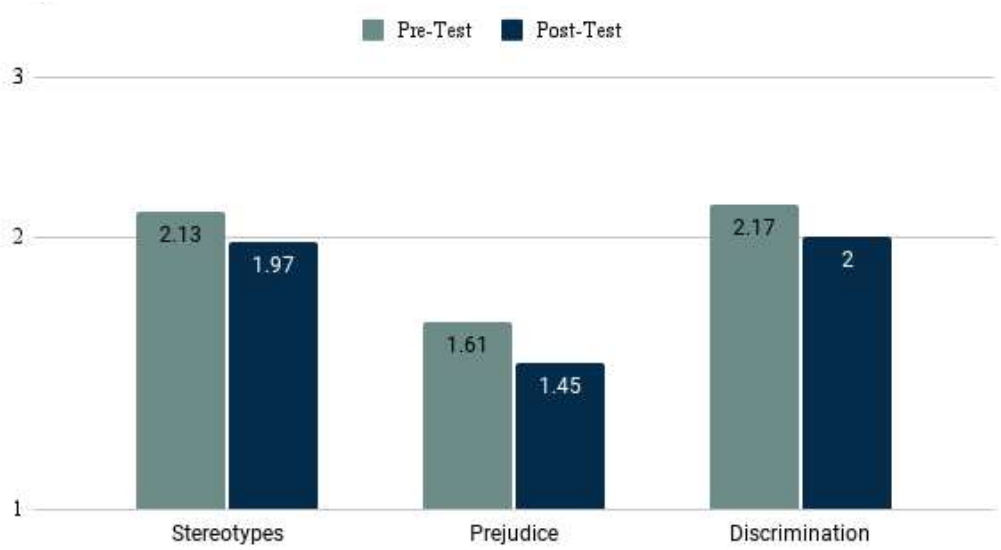
Increased Addiction Knowledge

Results show that knowledge improved for participants completing the enCompass training. This measure of addiction knowledge is based on an SUD knowledge scale developed by the Addiction Policy Forum and the University of Delaware. Higher scores indicate more knowledge. All differences between pre- and post-tests are statistically significant ($p<0.001$).



Reductions in Stigma

Manifestations of stigma -- including stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination -- reduced from pre to post test. Previously validated scales were utilized for the stigma constructs and participants generally indicated how much they agreed or disagreed with stigma items on 1 to 5 point scales. Higher scores indicate more stigma.



A Brief Overview of Stigma

People with Substance Use Disorders (SUD) often face harsh moral judgments and frequent discrimination.[1] Stigma, defined as negative attitudes and behaviors toward individuals with specific characteristics like addiction, is particularly prominent in SUDs. While various health conditions, such as mental illness, HIV, and obesity, are stigmatized, SUDs are considered the most stigmatized health conditions globally.[2,3] A multi-country study by the World Health Organization (WHO) found substance use to be the most stigmatized condition, with alcohol use ranked fourth among highly stigmatized conditions like homelessness and HIV.[4]

Stigma can be divided into three primary categories: 1) stereotypes, which are inaccurate beliefs about a group of people; 2) prejudice, which refers to negative feelings or emotions toward a group; and 3) discrimination, which involves unjust treatment of individuals based on group membership.[5] People with SUDs or those in recovery often experience discrimination in areas such as healthcare, employment, child custody decisions, and housing.

Research has shown that individuals who face stigma due to an SUD are more likely to continue substance use, experience delayed access to treatment, and have higher dropout rates.[6,7] For those with criminal justice involvement, stigma is associated with greater psychological distress, lower self-esteem, and increased social isolation.[8,9]

Reducing stigma requires improving public knowledge about addiction and addressing misconceptions about SUDs. The belief that SUDs stem from personal choice, rather than being a health condition, reflects stigma. Recognizing addiction as a treatable health condition encourages early intervention, access to healthcare, and better management of this chronic issue.

Understanding Substance Use Disorder Literacy

Substance use disorder literacy refers to the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes people have about substance use disorders, how they develop, and how to treat them.[10] It's essentially the ability to recognize, manage, and prevent substance use disorders in both yourself and others. Just like health literacy, which covers understanding physical health, addiction literacy empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their well-being.

The concept includes recognizing symptoms of substance use disorders like alcohol use disorder and opioid use disorder; understanding where to seek help; and knowing what treatments are available. It also encompasses the ability to support others struggling with substance use disorders and reduce stigma surrounding addiction.

Poor substance use disorder literacy can lead to misconceptions, like believing addiction is a moral failing or that they aren't treatable. This can prevent people from seeking help early, exacerbating conditions. On the flip side, improving addiction literacy in communities can increase understanding, reduce stigma, and encourage more people to seek professional support.

In a nutshell, addiction literacy is not just about knowledge—it's about fostering a culture of understanding, support, and proactive care. The more people understand substance use disorders, the better equipped society is to address them proactively and compassionately.

Journal Article

To read future on this study access the *enCompass: evaluation of a community-based substance use disorder stigma intervention* journal article found in the Journal of Addictive Diseases.

Demographics

Of the 492 study participants, 81% identified as female and 19% as male. Thirty-nine percent of participants (39%) were in the 30-44 age group, 34% were in the 45-59 age group, 16% were in the 60 and older age group, and 11% were in the 18-29 age group.

The race and ethnicity breakdown included: 82% White or European-American, 11% Black or African-American; 2% Latinx or Hispanic-American, 3% multiple race/ethnicity and Non-Hispanic, and 2% Other Non-Hispanic. Education levels varied among study participants, with 49% reporting a college degree, 28% a graduate degree, 17% some college or technical school, and 6% a high school degree or less.

Fifty-one percent identified as a friend or family member of someone with an SUD (51%); 36% identified as a professional in the SUD field; and 13% identified as an individual with a personal history of an SUD.

Other Findings

Participants who began with less knowledge gained more knowledge, and participants who began with more stigma lost more stigma. With few exceptions, the changes were similar regardless of participant socio-demographic characteristics or the facilitator. In addition, the intervention was rated as acceptable, appropriate, and feasible by participants, increasing confidence that it can be implemented successfully in community settings.

Conclusion

The evaluation results suggest that enCompass is a promising universal intervention for improving knowledge about SUD and reducing stigma towards people with SUD within communities. Participants' knowledge increased, and stigma decreased from before to after the intervention. These findings merit future evaluation of this intervention.

Demographics	n
Participants	492
Gender Identity	
Female	81%
Male	19%
Age	
18 - 29	11%
30 - 44	39%
45 - 59	34%
60+	16%
Race/Ethnicity	
Black/African American	11%
White/Non-Hispanic	82%
Other, Non-Hispanic	2%
Multiple, Non-Hispanic	3%
Hispanic/LatinX	2%
Education	
High School Degree or Less	6%
Some College or Technical School	17%
College Degree (AA, BA, etc)	49%
Graduate Education	28%
Relationship to SUD	
Professional in SUD Field	36%
Personal History of SUD	13%
Friend of Family Member	51%

Acknowledgments

This project was a collaborative effort between the Addiction Policy Forum, RecoveryOhio, and University of Delaware to test a new universal intervention for improving addiction knowledge about and reducing stigma towards people with SUD.

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