

National Recovery Month Comes of Age

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In 1989, NAADAC’s “Recovery Works!” observance brought the topic of treatment to the forefront for many leaders in the field of addiction. The premise of “Treatment Works!” was simple: substance use disorder treatment was effective in reducing addictions to alcohol and other drugs; and, the nation needed to recognize the tremendous work being done by counselors and other field workers involved in addiction treatment.

As the observance evolved into National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month in late 1997, the scope and objectives of the effort broadened to include and focus on recovery as a central point and goal of substance use disorder treatment. At the same time, SAMHSA/CSAT was rolling out the first cohort of Recovery Community Support Programs, which aimed to provide an ongoing network of support for those in recovery from substance use disorders. These two important activities helped shape what is now a thriving recovery movement. The later took shape through a slow progression of multiplying community based events and activities aimed at educating the broader public about substance use disorders as a growing national health crisis.

The observance evolved once again in 2011 into National Recovery Month in order to embrace those in recovery from mental and substance use disorders. This was by far the most seismic change to date to the observance as it called into question the very essence of its origins. Such change also called into question the observance’s ability to survive the broader targeted audience under the umbrella of behavioral health. And yet it has survived and thrived.

Throughout this whole evolution there has been one consistent focus—an emphasis on those who have overcome one of the greatest human challenges possible: addiction. Moreover, National Recovery Month continues to emphasize that sustaining of recovery greatly depends on help from family, friends and the broader community. Perhaps the latter is the greatest gift that National Recovery Month has contributed to the broader discourse in the recovery field. And, let’s not forget that while

we have also made gains in the reduction of use of discriminatory language and reshaped established assumptions about those in need of recovery or in recovery, there is still much work to be accomplished to eliminate disparities toward those in recovery.

From an organizational perspective, National Recovery Month has managed to continue to engage more than 200 Planning Partners who come together four times each year to help plan and implement the campaign. These partners come from every corner within and outside the mental and substance use disorder field and even from neighboring countries such as Canada. Their collective volunteer efforts remain the heart of Recovery Month. Without a doubt National Recovery Month has earned a place in the annals of the recovery movement. It continues to offer an opportunity for those in recovery, their family, friends and the broader community to reflect on the gains made by those in recovery. Similarly, the campaign continues to raise awareness within the ranks of those who still need to find recovery and most importantly to engage those in the civic, elected and business sectors to support efforts to fund recovery services at all levels.

NAADAC should be proud of its involvement in the seminal steps of this effort. Most importantly, NAADAC’s members need to continue to proudly engage in events and activities during September and throughout the year. We’ve come a long way together in the last 26 years. The 2015 National Recovery Month theme is “Join the Voices for Recovery: Visible, Vocal Valuable!” It is my hope that every person in recovery and others take the opportunity to embrace the theme, become involved and “join the voices for recovery!”



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