

Guide for Substance Use Screening in Nursing Facilities



Did you know?

Over the past decade, the number of adults entering nursing facilities with opioid and substance use disorders (OUD/SUD) have increased.¹ According to the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 40 million Americans had a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year. SUDs continue to be an important health issue in our country.

Why Screen for Substance Use in Nursing Facilities?

Routine substance use screening should be conducted with all nursing facility residents for the following purposes:

- Creates opportunities for residents to share their substance use history.
- Promotes early identification to improve the health and well-being of the residents.
- Provides an opportunity to add interventions to the resident's care plan to increase safety.
- Avoids adverse interactions with prescribed medications or withdrawal symptoms.
- Allows for coordination of substance use treatment and referral.

Screening for substance use does not take long and can be conducted effectively in various settings. Screening should also be conducted before prescribing medications that may interact negatively with alcohol or other substances and if a resident reports using an over-the-counter product or herbal supplement that may precipitate an adverse reaction.²

Planning a Screening Program

Before adopting screening practices for SUDs in your facility, the multidisciplinary team should consider the following questions:

- Which screening tools are needed? Are the screening tools available in your facility residents' languages? How long does the screening take to administer?
- Who will conduct the screening? What support, training and experience do staff need to conduct the screening?
- How will you ensure the process respects informed consent, health literacy, privacy, and confidentiality?
- Who will support screening implementation and follow-up?
- What actions should be taken if there is a positive screening?
- Who will assist in making referrals and follow-ups?
- How can you best use available behavioral health staff or consultants to support screening implementation?



When To Screen

- Universal screening for substance use should be conducted while screening for other medical conditions as part of a routine examination.
- Consider screening when marked changes in the resident's physical appearance, behavior, appetite, sleeping habits, or impaired coordination occur.
- Screening should also be conducted before prescribing medications that may interact negatively with alcohol or other substances and if a resident reports using an over-the-counter product or herbal supplement to prevent an adverse reaction.
- Utilize voluntary drug screening and person/property inspections where appropriate to support the safety and well-being of all residents.



Substance Use Screening Guide

Follow these tips to screen for SUDs successfully:

- Start the conversation in a reassuring and compassionate manner.
- Consider language such as, “Can I ask you about drug or alcohol use? This information can help us provide you with useful resources.”
- If the screening tool identifies a risk of a possible SUD, it is important to:
 1. Remain nonjudgmental.
 2. Provide additional screening if applicable and provide education on SUDs while continuing to build a rapport with the resident.
 3. Discuss possible treatment, resources and services in their local area. If possible, provide an updated resource list or directory to residents.

- Provide connection to support groups, such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA), Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and other recovery programs. Support groups can offer a valuable layer of support when combined with treatment led by behavioral health professionals.
- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is an alternative for individuals recovering from alcohol or opioid use disorders. It is important to remember that not all people will respond to medications, but for a subset of individuals, they can be an important tool in the recovery process.
- Utilize your facility's interdisciplinary care team to assist residents in exploring which options may be right for them.

If Current Substance Use is Suspected

Nursing staff should take these action steps to support the safety of residents who may be using substances:

- Use appropriate monitoring and supervision in the facility to maintain the health and safety of the resident suspected of substance use and all residents. Some key moments to consider are visitations and off-campus activities.
- Restrict or enforce supervised visitation if the resident's visitor(s) are deemed a danger to the resident, other residents, and/or staff.³
- Explore alternative activities to support recovery, develop a relapse prevention/recovery plan, and encourage the resident to actively engage in their recovery self-help strategies.



Screening Tools

The **CAGE** is a quick, four-question screening tool used to identify potential problems with alcohol use.

The **CAGE-AID** is an adapted version of the original CAGE questionnaire that includes questions about both alcohol and substance use. It consists of four simple yes/no questions designed to identify potential substance use issues.

Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) is a 10-question screening tool used to identify risky alcohol use.



References

1. Barriers to Care for Nursing Home Residents With Substance Use Disorders: A Qualitative Study
2. A Guide to Substance Abuse Services for Primary Care Clinicians - Chapter 2
3. State Operations Manual Appendix PP Guidance to Surveyors for Long Term Care Facilities