

Caring for someone who is dependent on alcohol or another drug



Impacts on families and carers

When someone is dependent on alcohol or another drug the people around them are affected. Family and friends may find themselves providing emotional and practical support for that person.

They may do this without realising that they are acting in the role of 'carer'. They may not realise that, as carers, there is specialist support available for them.

"You tend to isolate yourself when someone in your family is struggling with an addiction. You think that no one will understand or that people will judge. But you soon realise that you need help for yourself" - carer for her daughter who uses drugs and has a mental illness.

Many people are impacted by the alcohol or drug use of someone they are close to. Research estimates that as many as one in three Australians have had this experience¹.

Those most impacted by another person's use of alcohol or other drugs will be their family and carers. It is important for these carers to access support for themselves as their caring responsibilities can have an impact on physical and mental health.

Carers who support someone with a dependence on alcohol or another drug report higher levels of psychological distress and lower satisfaction with their personal health than other groups of carers².

Are you caring for someone? Help for carers is available

In order to access specialised assistance, it can be helpful to understand what it means to be a 'carer'.

You are a carer if you provide care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic health condition, terminal illness or who is frail.

You are a carer even when:

- You do not live with the person you support
- You are a parent, child, sibling, friend or neighbour
- You are not the only person or the main person who cares for them
- The person you care for doesn't need your help all of the time
- The person you care for does not think they need a carer
- You don't want to tell anyone that you are a carer.

Support for carers

"Addiction impacts the whole family. The person who is dependant might not want to change, they might be stuck. But that doesn't mean the people around them need to stay stuck too. They can get help for themselves" - family counsellor in drug support program.

Expert help is available for carers. This includes: counselling, peer support groups, information and referral services. Carers can find it valuable to connect with services and to talk to others who have had similar experiences.

"It is such a relief to go to groups and meet other carers, to see that you are not alone, that you don't have to go it alone" - carer for her daughter who uses drugs and has a mental illness.

References:

1 Room R, Ferris J, Laslett AM, Livingston M, Mugavin J, Wilkinson C. The drinker's effect on the social environment Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2010;7(4):1855-1871. doi:10.3390/ijerph7041855

2 Carers NSW 2018 Carer Survey.



Carers can benefit from professional assistance, one-to-one counselling and attending peer support groups.

More information is available through Carers NSW
www.carersnsw.org.au
and Carer Gateway
www.carergateway.gov.au
or call 1800 422 737

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