



ACT ON ADDICTION: 2026 FACT SHEET

BREAK THE SILENCE, BREAK THE STIGMA: Combatting Substance Use in Northern Virginia



A COMMUNITY-WIDE CHALLENGE

According to Inova's 2026 Act on Addiction Survey, the impact of substance use is felt widely by individuals and families living in our community.

Nearly 1 in 2 survey respondents (46%) say they have been personally impacted by, or know someone impacted by, problems related to alcohol or substance use.

- The impact is even more pronounced among younger generations: **50% of Gen Z** and **53% of Millennials** report being affected, compared to 42% of Gen X and 35% of Baby Boomers.
- Families are especially vulnerable — **households with children report higher rates of impact (50%)** than those without (44%).
- The roots often start early: national data show nearly **90% of American adults** with substance use disorder began using substances in their youth (SAMHSA).

Yet even as the need grows, help feels out of reach for too many people.

- 48% of respondents say a lack of knowledge about where to find help is likely a leading barrier to seeking care.
- In Northern Virginia, only 4 in 10 respondents feel confident they know what treatment options exist locally, and that confidence drops even further among older adults (34% of Gen X, 29% of Baby Boomers).
- This data reflects a national trend. In 2024, nearly 4 in 10 adults who couldn't get needed treatment said it was because they simply didn't know where to go (American Addiction Centers).

Fear and stigma compound the problem, shielding solutions from those who need it most.



3 in 4 respondents point to fear of exposure as a top reason they believe people don't seek treatment.



Fewer than half (48%) believe their community would respond supportively if someone shared their recovery journey openly — and that number is even lower among women (44%), Black (45%) and Hispanic (47%) respondents, and rural residents (43%).



The human cost is severe: only 1 in 3 people who died from an overdose had ever received treatment for a mental health or substance use condition — and in Virginia, that number is even lower, at 30.7% (CDC).

A HOPEFUL PATH FORWARD:

Fuel understanding of substance use disorder, fuel critical conversations

There's a powerful, science-backed opportunity to change the conversation, **and most of our community hasn't heard it yet.**

- Today, less than 1 in 5 (19%) **of Northern Virginians who responded to the survey** report being highly familiar with the idea that substance use disorder is a brain disorder. **But once people understand this concept, the impact is immediate: 86% say it would help reduce stigma.**
- The science is clear: substance use causes real, measurable changes to the brain circuits that govern reward, stress, and self-control, and those changes can persist long after someone stops using substances or alcohol (NIH).
- Nationally, nearly 1 in 4 Americans still don't recognize addiction as a health condition, a knowledge gap that fuels stereotypes, discomfort, and opposition to the very policies proven to help (Addiction Policy).



When we understand addiction as a brain disorder rather than a moral failing, we open the door to compassion, earlier conversations, and faster access to care.

THERE'S HOPE IN CONNECTION.

Substance use disorder thrives in silence. Reducing stigma starts with awareness, and awareness starts with community. That's why Inova is bringing the community together for ***Connection Changes the Brain: Rethinking Addiction and Recovery.***

Members of the Northern Virginia Community are invited to join, and participate, in meaningful dialogue with leading experts around substance use and how we can work together to combat the stigma that shields solutions.



Inova is hosting this event as part of its years-long Act on Addiction campaign, a community-wide effort to reduce stigma and foster better outcomes for those whose lives have been impacted by addiction in our community.



Learn more, find resources, and RSVP at ActOnAddictionNow.org