

What is The ASAM Criteria®?

ASAM CRITERIA®

The ASAM Criteria is the most widely used set of standards for matching each patient to the right type of addiction treatment for them.

Introduction to *The ASAM Criteria*

Your health plan is using *The ASAM Criteria* to make decisions about your addiction treatment. *The ASAM Criteria* supports person-centered treatment. When you enter treatment, your providers will complete an assessment to identify all the issues that contribute to your addiction. This assessment will help them to determine how serious your illness is and the best way to treat you.

Principles of *The ASAM Criteria*

The treatment principles in *The ASAM Criteria* can help you understand the recommendations that your provider makes for your care.

- **Consider the whole person.** Treatment should consider all the health and life issues that contribute to your addiction.
- **Tailor treatment for each patient.** Effective treatment should be tailored to your needs and strengths
- **Treatment length based on progress.** The length of treatment should depend on your progress and changing needs.
- **A continuum of care.** You should be assessed regularly to see if you are ready for less intense treatment, or if you need more intense treatment. When you leave one level, you should continue treatment in another level.



Assessment

The first step in treatment is the assessment. You are asked about 6 areas of your health and life that impact your needs, including:

1. **Risk for withdrawal.** This area explores your past and current experiences with drugs and alcohol. Are you in immediate danger? Do you need withdrawal management?
2. **Physical health problems.** Do you have health conditions that require ongoing treatment such as diabetes, HIV, or chronic pain? Do you have any other health problems such as a skin infection?
3. **Mental health problems.** Do you have mental health problems that need to be addressed during treatment? For example, do you suffer from depression or anxiety?
4. **Readiness to Change.** Are you interested in recovery? Do you feel ready and willing to make changes in your substance use?
5. **Risk for relapse.** How likely are you to continue to use drugs or alcohol in your current living situation? How well can you cope with negative feelings, peer pressure, and stress without using alcohol or drugs?
6. **Recovery or Living Environment.** Do you have a safe living environment? Do you have friends or family who are supportive of your recovery? Are you safe at home? Are there transportation, childcare, housing, or job issues that would prevent you from engaging in treatment?

The treating provider uses your answers to determine how severe your illness is, your treatment needs, and your strengths that can help you recover.

Levels of Care

The ASAM Criteria assessment is used to recommend the right level of care for you. The levels of treatment can be grouped into 4 broad categories:

1. Outpatient: This level of care provides less than 9 hours per week of treatment services including:

- Therapy to increase your interest in treatment.
- Ongoing monitoring services for people who are in recovery.

2. Intensive Outpatient and Partial Hospitalization: This level of care serves those who need more intense treatment but do not need 24-hour supervision in a residential program.

- Intensive outpatient programs provide at least 9 hours of treatment services per week.
- Partial hospitalization services provide at least 20 hours of treatment services per week.

3. Residential: Residential programs provide treatment services in a living environment that supports recovery. The least intense residential treatment programs provide at least 5 hours of treatment services per week. They also provide support and structure to help you practice the skills needed to maintain recovery. The most intense residential treatment programs provide 24-hour nursing care to address co-occurring physical or mental health problems.

4. Hospital: Hospital services offer 24-hour nursing care and daily physician care for severe, unstable co-occurring physical or mental health problems. Counseling is also available to engage you in the next stages of treatment.

A “level of care” can refer to the intensity of treatment you might receive, such as the difference between a walk-in clinic and a 24-hour hospital stay. It is the goal of treatment providers to make sure the care you receive keeps you safe, and addresses all risks, but also that the care is as “least intensive,” as possible, which helps you avoid unnecessary or wasteful treatment.

The goal of *The ASAM Criteria* is to match you to the least intense level of care where your treatment needs can be safely addressed.

Summary

The ASAM Criteria helps patients, treatment providers, and health plans develop treatment plans that meet the needs of each person. We encourage you to work with your treatment provider to create your treatment plan. Using *The ASAM Criteria*, you can become a more active partner in your own care and understand how your risks and strengths can affect your recovery.

At first, I couldn't understand why I was being sent to a residential center to address my alcohol use. I mean, it wasn't like I was drinking a bottle a day. Turns out, the amount I was drinking was only part of the story. My doctor pointed out that some of my other health problems actually related to my drinking. She saw other patterns I hadn't noticed, too: the stress from work that sent me to the bar, the repeated promises to quit, even some physical signs of withdrawal. When my doctor made her treatment recommendation, she was looking at the "whole me," not just the amount of alcohol that was going in.

