

What is *The ASAM Criteria*?

ASAM CRITERIA®

Your health plan uses *The ASAM Criteria* to make decisions about treatment for substance use disorders (SUDs). *The ASAM Criteria* is the most widely used guide for choosing the right type of treatment for each person's unique needs.

A group of experts in addiction and mental health created the national standards in *The ASAM Criteria* using scientific evidence. These standards improve the quality of addiction treatment by:

- Considering all the health and life issues that contribute to your SUD
- Encouraging addiction treatment programs to offer a range of services to meet each patient's unique needs
- Helping care providers and health plans "speak the same language" to avoid misunderstandings

The ASAM Criteria Assessment

A care provider will assess your most pressing health needs and recommend a treatment program. Once you begin treatment, your care providers will assess all issues that affect your SUD. This assessment helps them suggest specific services to help you recover.

Your care providers will ask about 6 areas of your health and life that affect your needs. They will start by asking questions about the most serious health issues that need medical care. Sometimes, these are emergencies. Asking about the most serious health issues first helps you get the medical care you need quickly.

Principles of *The ASAM Criteria*

The ASAM Criteria follows a set of principles. These principles can help you understand the recommendations for your care.

- **Whole-Person Care:** Addiction is a complex and chronic illness. Your treatment should consider all the health and life issues that contribute to your SUD. Good addiction treatment helps you address:
 - Your substance use patterns
 - Other problem behaviors that may be related to your substance use, like gambling or driving under the influence
 - Any medical issues caused by or affecting your SUD
 - Mental health concerns
 - Challenges in your environment that can affect your recovery from SUD, like housing or transportation
 - The unique social and cultural factors that affect your SUD
- **Tailored Treatment:** A lot of health and life issues affect SUD and recovery. Some of these issues can be very personal. This makes each person's experience of addiction different. Treatment services that help someone else may not be as helpful for you.
Your treatment should provide services to fit your unique needs and preferences. The amount of time you spend in treatment depends on your progress and changing needs.
- **Ongoing Care:** Because addiction is a chronic illness, your needs may change over time. You may need a few types of treatment programs at different times to support your recovery. You may need less support as you recover. Or you may need more support as your needs change.
All types of addiction treatment programs should be connected to support your changing needs. This connection helps you switch to another type of addiction treatment program that can support your changing needs.
- **Long-Term Monitoring:** Addiction is like any other chronic illness, such as heart disease. It can return, even if you have been in recovery for years. You should stay in touch with your care providers when you are in recovery in case your illness returns.

Your care provider will ask about the following 6 areas:

1 Intoxication, Withdrawal, and Medication Needs:

This area looks at your recent use of alcohol and other drugs.

This is important because intoxication and withdrawal can be life threatening.

This area also looks at your need for addiction medication. Research shows that addiction medication helps treat withdrawal and SUD. Your care providers will ask questions to figure out if addiction medication could be helpful for you.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Do you need immediate medical care?
- Do you need medication to treat an overdose?
- Do you need medication to treat withdrawal?
- Do you need medication to decrease cravings?

2 Physical Health Concerns:

This area looks at your physical health.

Substance use can cause some physical health conditions. Substance use can also worsen physical health conditions you might already have. It can also make it harder to manage many physical health conditions.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Has your use of alcohol or other drugs affected your physical health?
- Do you need immediate medical care for health concerns like seizures, breathing trouble, or new severe pain?
- Do you need medical care for health conditions like diabetes, HIV, or chronic pain?
- Do you have any other health concerns right now, like a skin infection?
- Are you pregnant? Do you need prenatal care?

3 Mental Health and Learning Concerns:

This area looks at your mental health. It also looks at learning challenges.

Mental health concerns are common in people who have SUD. Substance use makes it harder to manage a lot of mental health concerns. It can cause some mental health concerns and learning challenges. Substance use can also worsen any mental health conditions or learning challenges you might already have.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Has your use of alcohol or other drugs affected your mental health or your thinking?
- Are you having thoughts about hurting yourself or others?
- Are you having thoughts about suicide?
- Do you need care for mental health conditions like depression or bipolar disorder?
- Do your mental health concerns make it hard to take part in treatment?
- Do you need any support to help you learn?

ASAM Criteria Assessment Areas

1 INTOXICATION, WITHDRAWAL, AND MEDICATION NEEDS

2 PHYSICAL HEALTH CONCERNs

3 MENTAL HEALTH AND LEARNING CONCERNs

4 SUBSTANCE USE RISKS

5 RECOVERY ENVIRONMENT

6 PERSONAL PREFERENCES AND BARRIERS

4 **Substance Use Risks:** This area looks at how you use alcohol and other drugs. It also looks at your risk for harm.

Understanding how and why you use alcohol and other drugs is important. SUD symptoms can worsen over time. SUD can lead to serious harm. You can get into an accident while intoxicated or die from an overdose. Substance use can also have a big impact on your life in other ways. It can ruin relationships and make it hard for you to keep a job.

Understanding how and why you started using substances helps you build a plan for recovery. It also helps you stay safe.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Do you use alcohol or other drugs in ways that put you at risk for harm?
- Are you likely to continue using alcohol or other drugs?
- Do you take risks like driving drunk or having risky sex when you use alcohol or other drugs?
- How well do you cope with negative feelings, peer pressure, and stress?

5 **Recovery Environment:** This area looks at how well your home and community support your treatment and recovery.

This includes the people around you.

A safe and supportive environment is important for recovery. You also need to be able to function in your environment to stay in recovery. Having healthy structure in your life, like a job and healthy relationships, is part of recovery.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Do you have a safe place to live?
- Do your family and friends support your recovery?
- Do you function well at home, work, and school?
- Could your living situation keep you from taking part in treatment?

6 **Personal Preferences and Barriers:** This area looks at your preferences for your care. It also looks at barriers that could keep you from getting care.

Your preferences are important when it comes to your treatment. You might not be able to take part in the recommended treatment because of your job or kids. You can work with your care providers to get past barriers to care. You can also work with them to find different treatment options. You can be an active partner in your own care.

Examples of questions your care providers may think about in this area include:

- Do transportation, childcare, housing, money, or job issues make it hard for you to take part in treatment?
- Are you willing to take part in the recommended 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 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.

Your answers to questions like these help your care providers figure out:

- How severe your SUD is
- The best way to meet your treatment needs

The ASAM Criteria Continuum of Care for Adult Addiction Treatment



Types of Addiction Treatment

Treatment for SUD can be provided in many different types of programs. Different programs provide different treatment. Some provide medical care, some do not. All programs provide therapy and counseling services. Some provide less than 9 hours of care each week. Other programs provide more than 20 hours of care each week.

The goal of *The ASAM Criteria* is to recommend the least intensive treatment program that can address your needs safely and effectively. This gives you the right care for your unique needs.

The ASAM Criteria assessment helps your care providers recommend the right type of addiction treatment program. There are 4 general levels of treatment programs. These general levels of treatment programs include subtypes known as levels of care.



“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 and fights at home 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. **”**

The ASAM Criteria Levels of Care include:

1. **Outpatient Treatment:** Also known as Level 1, this type of treatment is delivered in a variety of community settings like behavioral health clinics, medical offices, and mobile clinics. It can also be delivered virtually. There are 3 levels of outpatient treatment:

Level 1.0: Long-Term Remission Monitoring: Your care providers would recommend this treatment for long-term monitoring once you have been in stable recovery for more than a year.

Long-term remission monitoring involves checkups at least every 3 months. The point of these checkups is to make sure you have the tools and support you need to stay in recovery. To do this, your care providers will assess the 6 areas of your health and life that affect your needs. If you have new needs, your care providers may make changes to your treatment. This could include recommending a different type of addiction treatment program if your illness returns.

Level 1.5: Outpatient Therapy: Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you have a mild SUD. They may also recommend this treatment if you have the recovery skills and support needed to avoid serious harm with treatment once or twice each week. This treatment does not provide medical care for intoxication, withdrawal, or physical health conditions.

Outpatient therapy involves less than 9 hours of services each week. Many patients receive 1 to 2 hours of services each week. Examples of services include therapy, counseling, and education to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. Services may include counseling to help you build a relationship with your care providers and encourage you to take part in more treatment.

Level 1.7: Medically Managed Outpatient Treatment: Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you need medical care without monitoring from nurses for:

- Withdrawal management
- Starting or changing addiction medication
- Physical health concerns
- Mental health concerns

These programs also provide counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns.

“ I don't have a lot of support people in my life, and my living situation isn't very healthy right now, so I can understand being at a high risk in that particular area. What I didn't notice is that my personal motivation and my physical health are the strongest they've ever been. And those strengths can actually lower my overall risk. So it turns out my treatment plan includes a lot of goals about finding a better place to live—one that supports the other healthy areas of my life. The type of care I receive is determined by my risks, but also by my strengths. **”**

The ASAM Criteria Levels of Care include:

2. **Intensive Outpatient (IOP) and High-Intensity Outpatient (HIOP) Treatment:** Also known as Level 2, this type of treatment is delivered in a variety of community settings like behavioral health clinics and medical offices.

If you do not have a safe and supportive place to live, your care providers may also recommend a recovery residence. A recovery residence is a safe and supportive home where you can live during outpatient treatment.

There are 3 levels of IOP and HIOP treatment:

- **Level 2.1: Intensive Outpatient (IOP) Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment program if you:
 - Need treatment several days each week to learn and practice recovery skills
 - Have enough recovery skills and supports to avoid serious harm with treatment several days each weekIOP treatment involves 9 to 19 hours of services each week. IOP is sometimes called day treatment or evening care. Examples of services include counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. This treatment provides a safe space with peer support where you can learn and practice coping skills.
- **Level 2.5: High-Intensity Outpatient (HIOP) Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you:
 - Need structure and support from your care providers during the day (but not at night) to avoid serious harm
 - Need intensive treatment almost every day to learn and practice recovery skillsThe main difference between IOP and HIOP treatment is the amount of service provided. HIOP treatment involves 20 or more hours of services each week. HIOP is sometimes called partial hospital care. Examples of services include counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. This treatment provides a safe space with peer support where you can practice coping skills.
- **Level 2.7: Medically Managed Intensive Outpatient Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment program if you need medical care with monitoring from nurses for:
 - Withdrawal management
 - Starting or changing addiction medication
 - Physical health concerns
 - Mental health concernsThese programs also provide counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. Medically managed intensive outpatient treatment involves 20 or more hours of services each week.

The ASAM Criteria Levels of Care include:

3. Residential Treatment: Also known as Level 3, this type of treatment is delivered in a dedicated addiction treatment facility. You live at this facility during this phase of your treatment. Residential treatment gives 24-hour support and structure to help you learn and practice skills to achieve and stay in recovery.

There are 3 levels of residential treatment:

- **Level 3.1: Low-Intensity Residential Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you:

- Can safely take part in community activities like work or school during the day
- Need structure and support from your care providers at night and on weekends to avoid serious harm
- Need 24-hour structure from your care providers and regular treatment to learn and practice recovery skills

Low-intensity residential treatment involves 9 to 19 hours of services each week. Examples of services include counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. This treatment provides a safe space with peer support where you can learn and practice coping skills.

- **Level 3.5: High-Intensity Residential Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you:

- Need 24-hour supervision from your care providers to avoid serious harm
- Need round-the-clock care to learn and practice essential life skills that support recovery, like taking care of yourself or your family and building healthy friendships

High-intensity residential treatment involves 20 or more hours of services each week. Examples of services include counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. This treatment provides a safe space with peer support where you can learn and practice recovery skills.

- **Level 3.7: Medically Managed Residential Treatment:** Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you need medical care with monitoring from nurses at night or on weekends for:

- Intoxication or withdrawal management
- Starting or changing addiction medication
- Physical health concerns
- Mental health concerns

These programs also provide counseling, education, and therapy to help you manage your SUD and mental health concerns. Medically managed residential treatment involves 20 or more hours of services each week.

The ASAM Criteria Levels of Care include:

4. Level 4: Inpatient Treatment: This type of treatment is delivered in a hospital.

Your care providers may recommend this treatment if you have an SUD and physical or mental health concerns that need urgent medical care. You would stay in the hospital and get round-the-clock medical care from doctors and nurses.

The point of inpatient treatment is to stabilize your physical or mental health concerns so that you can safely take part in ongoing addiction treatment in an outpatient or residential setting.

Mental Health Care

Mental health concerns are common in people who have an SUD. When a person has an SUD and mental health concerns, the mental health concerns are called “co-occurring conditions.” All addiction treatment programs should be able to help you manage both your SUD and your mental health concerns.

You may need specialized treatment if you are experiencing more serious mental health concerns. Some treatment programs can provide both addiction treatment and specialized mental health care. When specialized mental health care is provided along with SUD treatment it is known as co-occurring enhanced (COE) treatment.

Examples of specialized mental health services include:

- Care from psychiatrists
- Specific therapy, counseling, and education from mental health care providers
- More one-on-one support from your care providers

An addiction treatment program that provides specialized mental health care is called a COE treatment program. For example, a Level 3.5 COE program is a high-intensity residential treatment program (Level 3.5) that also provides specialized mental health care (COE treatment).

Summary

The ASAM Criteria helps patients, care providers, and health plans make treatment decisions that meet the needs of each person. We encourage you to work with your care providers to create your treatment plan. You can be an active partner in your own care with *The ASAM Criteria*.



Learn more about ASAM & The ASAM Criteria

www.asamcriteria.org