

**The Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction Advisory Council (AODAAC) FY25 Priorities
Health and Human Services Committee Meeting – October 17, 2024**

CHAIR: Elyse R. Grossman, J.D., Ph.D.

The Montgomery County Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction Advisory Council (AODAAC) identified two major priorities for Fiscal Year 2025:

1. *To Continue Examining Issues Facing Youth in our County and Provide Recommendations to the County Executive and County Council to Improve the Situation.*

Research shows that childhood and early adolescence is a time when people are most likely to begin using drugs – including tobacco, alcohol, and illegal and prescription drugs. Youth who start using alcohol or other substances earlier in life have worse trajectories, greater consequences, and are more likely to develop an alcohol or substance use disorder when they are older. This means there needs to be a comprehensive county-wide strategy that both prevents and reduces youth substance use and provides harm reduction, treatment and recovery services for those who do use.

Some of the issues that AODAAC will work to address are vaping among youth; substance use in schools; and underage drinking. AODAAC will examine and document these issues throughout the County and will work towards procuring and distributing resources, educating and partnering with parents and caregivers, and partnering with other BCCs and organizations that are already working on these issues. Our goal is to provide recommendations to the County Executive and the County Council on how to best address and reduce youth substance use and related harms within our county.

2. *To Continue to Work to Address the Issue of Stigma Related to Substance Use and Misuse and Addiction.*

Stigma is an attitude, discrimination, or prejudice directed towards an individual or a group and can prevent a person from seeking or accepting proper care, support, and treatment. Additionally, stigma can suppress essential evidence-based policy measures. An important issue when addressing stigma is to monitor our language when discussing those with substance use, misuse, or addiction issues.

Potential ways that the AODAAC will continue to work to address the issue of stigma in the county include holding trainings; advocating for changes to stigmatizing language in official county laws, policies, and other consumer-facing information (e.g., documents and websites); and partnering with other organizations.

Although with both these issues, we aim for a comprehensive county-wide approach, we will also attempt to influence vulnerable subgroups typically viewed as hard to reach and hard to treat. We also strongly urge county officials to continue to monitor alcohol and other drug fatalities in the county and provide funding and incentives for and within the substance use domain. For example, additional staff are needed to provide prevention and harm reduction services in our county. Community-based peer-run organizations should be supported – perhaps by encouraging the addition of social workers to County recreation centers, embedding peers in other locations (e.g., ERs, jails, probation, with MCPD and MCFRS for overdose calls, etc.), and providing additionally funding to address staffing needs. We also encourage county officials to create incentives for staff retention within the mental health and substance use domains – e.g., student loan repayment programs, clear career tracks, childcare and housing assistance, etc. – an area filled with high stress jobs, low pay, and tremendous turn over.