

Information about NA Narcotics Anonymous

Narcotics Anonymous is an international, community-based association of recovering drug addicts with more than 28,000 weekly meetings in 113 countries.

Development

Narcotics Anonymous sprang from the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in the late 1940s, with meetings first sprouting up in the Los Angeles area of California, USA, in the early fifties. After formally adapting the AA model in 1953, Narcotics Anonymous started as a small US movement that today has grown into one of the world's oldest and largest organizations of its type. For many years, the society grew very slowly, spreading from Los Angeles to other major North American cities and Australia in the early 1970s. In 1983, Narcotics Anonymous published its self-titled Basic Text, spurring tremendous growth, with groups forming rapidly in Brazil, Colombia, Germany, India, the Irish Republic, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

Today, Narcotics Anonymous is fairly well established throughout much of the Americas, Western Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, with newly formed groups and NA communities scattered through the Indian subcontinent, Africa, East Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe. Narcotics Anonymous books and information pamphlets are currently available in 22 languages, with translations in process for 9 languages.

Program

NA's earliest self-titled pamphlet, known among members as "the White Booklet," describes Narcotics Anonymous as "a nonprofit fellowship or society of men and women for whom drugs had become a major problem . . . who meet regularly to help each other stay clean We are not interested in what or how much you used but only in what you want to do about your problem and how we can help." Membership is open to any drug addict, regardless of the particular drug or combination of drugs used. When adapting AA's First Step, the word "addiction" was substituted for "alcohol," thus removing

drug-specific language and reflecting the disease concept of addiction.

There are no social, religious, economic, racial, ethnic, national, gender, or class-status membership restrictions. There are no dues or fees for membership; while most members regularly contribute small sums to help cover expenses, such contributions are not mandatory.

Narcotics Anonymous provides a recovery process and support network inextricably linked together. Narcotics Anonymous states that one of the keys to its success is the "therapeutic value" of addicts working with other addicts. Members share their successes and challenges in overcoming active addiction and living drug-free productive lives through application of the principles contained within the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of NA. The core of the Narcotics Anonymous recovery program is the Twelve Steps, which include admitting there is a problem, seeking help, engaging in a thorough self-examination, confidential self-disclosure, making amends for harm done, and helping drug addicts who want to recover. Central to the program is an emphasis on what is referred to as a "spiritual awakening," emphasizing its practical value, not its philosophical or metaphysical import. Narcotics Anonymous itself is non-religious and encourages each member to cultivate an individual understanding, religious or not, of this "spiritual awakening." Narcotics Anonymous is not affiliated with other organizations, including other Twelve Step programs, treatment centers, or correctional facilities. As an organization, NA does not employ professional counselors or therapists. Narcotics Anonymous has no residential facilities or clinics, and does not provide vocational, legal, financial, psychiatric, or medical services. NA has only one mission: to provide an environment in which addicts can help one another stop using drugs and find a new way to live.

Narcotics Anonymous encourages its members to observe complete abstinence from all drugs, including alcohol. It has been the experience of NA members that complete and continuous abstinence provides the best foundation for recovery and personal growth. Use of psychiatric medication and other medically indicated drugs prescribed by a physician and taken under medical supervision, is not

seen as compromising a person's "clean time." Regarding such use, members are encouraged to consult their own experience, the experience of other members, and qualified health professionals.

Service organization

The primary service provided by Narcotics Anonymous is the NA group meeting. Each group runs itself on the basis of principles common to the entire organization, laid out in the movement's literature. Most groups rent space for their weekly meetings in buildings run by public, religious, or civic organizations. Meetings are led by NA members; other members take part by talking in turn about their experiences in recovering from drug addiction, and sharing the activities associated with running a meeting. In a country where Narcotics Anonymous is a relatively new phenomenon, the NA group is the only level of organization. In a country where a number of Narcotics Anonymous groups have had the chance to develop and stabilize, groups will have elected delegates to form a local service committee. A number of services are usually offered by these area committees, among them: distribution of NA literature; telephone information services; public information presentations for treatment staff, civic organizations, government agencies, and schools; panel presentations to acquaint treatment or correctional facility residents with the NA program; and meeting directories for individual information and use in scheduling visits by client groups.

In some countries, especially the larger countries or those where Narcotics Anonymous is well established, a number of area committees have joined together to create regions. These regional committees handle services affecting the entire national movement, while the area committees handle local services.

An international delegate assembly called the World Service Conference provides guidance on issues affecting the entire organization. Primary among the priorities of NA's world services are activities that support young national movements and the translation of Narcotics Anonymous literature. For additional information, contact the World Service Office headquarters in Los Angeles, California. The mailing address, telephone number, fax number, and website address appear at the end of this pamphlet.

Positions on related issues or institutions

In order to maintain its focus, Narcotics Anonymous has established a tradition of non-endorsement, and does not take positions as an organization on anything outside its own specific sphere of activity. Narcotics Anonymous does not express opinions-either pro or con-on civil, social, medical, legal, or religious issues, nor does it take any stands on secondary addiction-related issues such as criminality, law enforcement, drug legalization or penalties, prostitution, HIV infection, or free-needle programs.

Narcotics Anonymous is entirely self-supporting, and accepts no financial contributions from non-members. In a similar vein, it is generally understood that groups and service committees are run by members, for members.

NA neither endorses nor opposes any other organization's philosophy or methodology. Narcotics Anonymous believes its sole competence is in providing a platform upon which drug addicts can share their recovery with one another. This is certainly not to say that Narcotics Anonymous believes there aren't any other "good" or "worthy" organizations. However, to remain free of the distraction of controversy, NA focuses all of its energy on its particular area of competence, leaving others to fulfill their own goals.

Cooperating with NA

Although, as previously stated, certain traditions do guide NA's relations with other organizations, Narcotics Anonymous welcomes the cooperation of those in government, the clergy, the helping professions, and private voluntary organizations. NA's non-addict friends have been instrumental in starting Narcotics Anonymous in many countries and helping NA grow. NA is happy to cooperate with others interested in Narcotics Anonymous by providing contact information, literature, and information about recovery through the NA Fellowship.

Additionally, NA members are available to bring panels into treatment centers and correctional facilities, sharing the NA program with

addicts otherwise unable to attend community-based meetings.

Membership demographics

No comprehensive surveys of the Narcotics Anonymous membership have been completed to date, due especially to NA's emphasis on protecting the anonymity of its members. However, it is possible to offer some general, informal observations about the nature of the membership and the effectiveness of the program. These observations are believed to be reasonably accurate.

The socioeconomic strata, represented by the NA membership, vary from country to country.

Most national movements are founded by members of one particular social or economic class, but as their outreach to the entire range of the drug-addicted population in each country becomes more effective, the membership becomes more broadly representative of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

All ethnic and religious backgrounds are represented among NA members. In a given national movement, the membership generally reflects the diversity or homogeneity of the background culture.

NA membership is completely voluntary; no attendance records are kept either for NA's own purposes or for others. Because of this, it is sometimes difficult to provide interested parties with comprehensive information about NA membership. A survey of twenty percent of the attendees at the 1996 World Convention held in St. Louis, Missouri revealed the following:

- * Male/female ratio: 58% male, 42% female.
- * Age ranged from 16 years to 69 years, with a mean average of 37 years.
- * Ethnicity: 56% Caucasian, 28% African-American, 4% Hispanic, 11% other.
- * Employment status: 76% employed full-time, 9% part-time, 5% homemakers, 4% disabled,
- * 1% retired, and 5% unemployed.

* Continuous abstinence/recovery: ranged from less than one year to 35 years, with a mean average of 5.5 years.

Rate of growth

Because no attendance records are kept, it is impossible to estimate what percentage of those who come to Narcotics Anonymous remain active in NA. The only sure indicator of the program's success is the rapid growth in the number of registered Narcotics Anonymous meetings in recent decades and the rapid spread of Narcotics Anonymous outside North America. In 1978, there were fewer than 200 registered groups in three countries. In 1983, more than a dozen countries had 2,966 meetings. In 2001, we know of approximately 19,192 groups holding 28,882 weekly meetings in 113 countries.

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