



Narcotics Anonymous

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*and* **Persons Receiving  
Medication-Assisted  
Treatment**



*This pamphlet is intended for professionals who prescribe medication to treat drug addiction. The service pamphlet NA Groups and Medication listed below contains a broader discussion of NA members and other medications.*

Narcotics Anonymous may be a community resource for your patients. NA's program of recovery has been working in the lives of hundreds of thousands of addicts around the world for over 70 years.<sup>1</sup> Going to NA may give your patients access to support from NA members and an ongoing twelve-step program of recovery. After attending some meetings to see what NA has to offer, patients can decide for themselves whether recovery in Narcotics Anonymous is a path for them.

We invite you to attend an open NA meeting in your community, and we thank you for taking the time to read this pamphlet.

## What Is Narcotics Anonymous?

Narcotics Anonymous is a worldwide, multilingual, multicultural, nonprofit fellowship based on complete abstinence from mood- or mind-altering drugs, including alcohol. There are over 72,200 NA recovery meetings held weekly in 143 countries.<sup>2</sup> Membership is open to all drug addicts, regardless of the particular drug or combination of drugs they used.

NA's Twelve Steps are adapted from those of Alcoholics Anonymous. 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. NA defines addiction as a spiritual, mental, and physical disease. The physical aspect is the compulsion to use drugs and the inability to stop once an addict starts using. Obsession, an overpowering desire to use drugs, regardless of the destructive consequences, is the mental aspect. The spiritual aspect is the total self-centeredness of addicts when they are using.

<sup>1</sup> As of 2023

<sup>2</sup> As of May 2023

Narcotics Anonymous links together a recovery process and a peer-support network. One of the keys to NA's success is the therapeutic value of addicts working with other addicts. Members share their successes and challenges in overcoming active addiction and living productive, drug-free lives through the application of the principles contained in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of NA. These principles are the core of the Narcotics Anonymous recovery program.

Narcotics Anonymous itself is a nonreligious program of recovery; each member is encouraged to cultivate an individual understanding, religious or not, of NA's spiritual principles and apply these principles to everyday life.

There are no social, religious, economic, racial, ethnic, national, gender, or class-status membership requirements or restrictions. There are no dues or fees for membership; most members contribute in meetings to help cover the costs incurred in facilitating the meeting and to assist in NA service-delivery efforts both locally and worldwide. Narcotics Anonymous is entirely self-supporting through member contributions and does not accept contributions from nonmembers.

## Organizational Philosophy

In order to maintain its focus, Narcotics Anonymous has established a tradition of nonendorsement. NA does not take positions on anything outside its specific sphere of activity. Narcotics Anonymous does not express





opinions—either pro or con—on civil, social, medical (including medically assisted treatment), legal, or religious issues. Additionally, it does not take stands on addiction-related issues such as criminality, law enforcement, drug legalization or penalties, prostitution, HIV/HCV infection, or syringe programs.

Narcotics Anonymous neither endorses nor opposes any other organization's philosophy or methodology. NA's primary focus is on providing a recovery environment wherein drug addicts can share their recovery experiences with one another. By remaining free from the distraction of controversy, NA participants can focus all of their energy on NA's primary purpose, which is carrying a message of recovery.

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## THE ONLY REQUIREMENT FOR MEMBERSHIP IS A DESIRE TO STOP USING.

*NA's Third Tradition*

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Membership in NA is not based on any admission criteria or on dues, fees, or pledges. Membership is based solely on desire—a desire to stop using drugs. NA is focused on helping its members live drug-free, productive lives. As stated in one of our books, *It Works: How and Why*, "Tradition Three": "The Third Tradition helps NA offer recovery to so many addicts by freeing us from having to make judgments about prospective members.

... Since the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop using, we as members have no reason to judge each other. Desire is not a measurable commodity. It lives in the heart of each individual member."

Many addicts come to NA meetings encouraged by treatment centers, law enforcement, or social service agencies. Many others attend a meeting because they heard of NA from family, friends, or other recovering addicts. Regardless of the path taken to NA, addicts attending their first meeting may not have a desire to live drug-free. Our literature makes it clear that "each addict should be allowed to decide if NA is the answer for him or herself. We cannot make the decision for others. . . . If new members are to feel that they belong in NA, they need to hear something they can identify with. They find that identification in the fellowship of recovering addicts in Narcotics Anonymous." (*It Works*, "Tradition Three") Repeated, regular attendance at NA meetings usually fuels the desire for recovery. Our aim is to welcome all addicts. A welcoming atmosphere helps addicts to decide whether NA, a program of complete abstinence, is a recovery program for them.

## What an Addict Can Expect at NA Meetings

Many addicts attending their first NA meeting may feel that they are visiting "another planet." NA meetings have their own language and culture. Language often heard in meetings includes the words *clean*, *Twelve Steps*, *Higher Power*, and *sponsor*. Cultural norms within NA meetings may include greeting addicts with welcoming hugs, handing out keytags for various lengths of cleantime, reciting common readings, first-name-only introductions, and lots of clapping. These examples are a small sample of the distinctive language and culture within NA, and these customs can be overwhelming to new attendees.



## Helpful Explanations of Common NA Terms and Customs

**CLEAN**—*Clean* in NA typically refers to being free of all drugs, or abstinent. However, an addict who is not clean is free to attend meetings; we hope through attendance at meetings addicts will gain a sense of belonging and identification with other recovering addicts. *Abstinence* and *membership* are not synonymous terms. Membership is based on a desire to stop using, not abstinence itself. “Our program of recovery begins with abstinence from all drugs, including alcohol. Sometimes people come to NA meetings while still using drugs, detoxing from drugs, or on drug replacement therapy. Regardless of what you may be taking when you first come to NA, you are welcome.” (Informational Pamphlet #29, *An Introduction to NA Meetings*)

**SPONSOR**—A sponsor is an individual recovering member who serves as a guide or mentor to new persons. A sponsor can share experience on how to live drug-free and face life on life’s terms without using drugs. A sponsor also helps members to work the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, the basis for recovery in NA.

**KEYTAGS**—Keytags are given to addicts for lengths of cleantime. Cleantime is a significant accomplishment within NA and is recognized at NA meetings. One keytag—the “welcome to NA” keytag—is given to any addict attending their first meeting regardless of whether they are clean or not.

**PRAYER**—Another practice is meetings usually opening and closing with a prayer. This is not intended to connote any religiosity. Each person is free to choose his or her own Higher Power, which some equate to a force greater than themselves helping them to remain drug-free. This is a personal decision made by each addict.

**FORMAT**—Meeting formats vary from meeting to meeting. Some of the more common formats are topic/discussion meetings and speaker meetings. NA also holds open meetings, where anyone is welcome to attend; however, only addicts share at these meetings. Closed meetings are for addicts only.

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**THERE ARE OVER 72,200 NA  
RECOVERY MEETINGS HELD WEEKLY  
IN 143 COUNTRIES.\***

*\*As of May 2023*

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In addition to what has been highlighted here, persons interested in NA and how meetings function are encouraged to read Informational Pamphlet #29, *An Introduction to NA Meetings*, which can be found at [www.na.org](http://www.na.org). This pamphlet will inform persons and perhaps help to prepare them for what to expect at NA meetings.



## NA and People on Medically Assisted Treatment

As we stated previously, NA has no opinion on the practices of any organizations or practitioners outside NA. However, within the context of NA and its meetings, we have generally accepted principles, and one is that NA is a program of complete abstinence. By definition, medically assisted therapy indicates that medication is being given to people to treat addiction. In NA, addiction is treated by abstinence and through application of the spiritual principles contained in the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.



“While maintaining an emphasis on the importance of total abstinence, still-using addicts are welcomed into our meetings with special encouragement to keep coming back.” (*It Works*, “Tradition Three”) Even though any addict is welcome to attend NA meetings, those attending NA while receiving medications to treat drug addiction may be met by welcoming, accommodating members or sometimes by members who express strong opinions about medically assisted treatment. Persons may want to remember that there are usually a host of



NA meetings in a community, and we encourage them to attend several different meetings.

“Tradition Ten restricts NA, as a fellowship, from stating opinions on outside issues. However, it places no such restriction on the individual member.” (*It Works*, “Tradition Ten”) Our hope is that those who receive medication to treat addiction will come to meetings and listen to people who are recovering. Through listening and through asking questions before and after meetings, attendees may gain a better understanding of NA and what it has to offer. NA offers a community and a lifestyle that support staying clean, and NA may be compatible for addicts on medically assisted protocols if they have a desire to become clean one day.

We understand that addicts whose path is medically assisted treatment may hear many messages in NA meetings. Some NA meetings make no distinction as to whether those receiving medication to treat addiction may share in a meeting, while other NA meetings limit the participation of those who are taking this type of medication. Each group is free to make its own decision on recovery meeting participation and involvement in group services for those receiving medication assistance for drug addiction.



MEMBERS SHARE THEIR SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES IN **OVERCOMING ACTIVE ADDICTION** AND LIVING PRODUCTIVE, DRUG-FREE LIVES THROUGH THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES CONTAINED IN THE TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS OF NA.





Regardless of the varying experiences addicts may encounter in meetings, the fact that NA is a program of complete abstinence should not be misunderstood. Members recognize that it takes some addicts longer than others to be drug-free, and most meetings encourage all addicts to keep coming back to meetings. One of the personal stories in our primary text, the Basic Text, shares the experience of a member who arrived to NA “on a drug-replacement program. He wanted what he saw in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous, but was afraid of returning to his old life if he quit methadone. For ten months, he went to meetings every day—and finally he got clean.” (*Narcotics Anonymous*, “The Only Requirement”)

Practitioners and physicians who prescribe medications to treat addiction may want to seek out an NA member contact in their community to assist them with locating meetings that may be more friendly to people receiving medication-assisted treatment. Patients are free and encouraged to do some of the legwork in finding NA meetings in their geographic area. These contacts may be found on a local website using a search engine. If there is a contact email for the local NA public relations or public information committee, that may be a starting point. In the event that there is no local NA website, one may write [pr@na.org](mailto:pr@na.org), and we will do our best to connect you with local members.

## Additional NA Material You May Wish to Read

- **NA Groups and Medication**—This service pamphlet (SP) is a resource meant to help groups maintain unity and focus on NA’s primary purpose as they navigate concerns that may surface with persons who are taking prescription medication.
- **An Introduction to NA Meetings (IP #29)**—This informational pamphlet offers a welcome to new persons by explaining practices that may be unfamiliar to those attending their initial meeting or in early recovery.
- **Sponsorship (IP #11)**—Sponsorship is essential to recovering members in NA. This introductory pamphlet aims to provide an understanding of sponsorship and may be especially helpful for new members.
- **Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous**—First published in 1983, NA’s primary book was last revised in 2008 to incorporate new personal stories into the Sixth Edition. “Our Program” contains ten chapters explaining the NA Fellowship and our program of recovery. “Our Members Share” includes personal stories from NA members worldwide.
- **It Works: How and Why**—This book, first published in 1993, represents the therapeutic value of one addict helping another by weaving the reasons why NA works with the how and why of recovery in a collection of 24 essays on NA’s Steps and Traditions.



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**World Service Office**

19737 Nordhoff Place, Chatsworth, CA 91311  
T 818.773.9999 • F 818.700.0700  
[www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

**World Service Office–Europe**

B-1050 Brussels, Belgium  
T +32/2/646-6012

**World Service Office–Canada**

Mississauga, Ontario

**World Service Office–Iran**

Tehran, Iran  
[www.wsoiran.org](http://www.wsoiran.org)



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