

NEBRASKA LICENSEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Alcohol/Substance Use Disorder – A Problematic Pattern, Part I

The NE LAP receives many questions regarding the criteria required for a health care professional (HCP) to meet the requirements of an alcohol or other substance use disorder (A/SUD), as well as questions as to why a HCP may not qualify for an A/SUD despite receiving a legal charge or being terminated from employment. The NE LAP, and other alcohol/substance use counselors, use the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to diagnose A/SUD. A diagnosis is determined based on how many criteria have been met. In the event more than one substance is used, the criteria must be met for each substance separately. The presence of 0–1 criteria indicates No Alcohol/Substance Use Disorder, 2–3 criteria present indicates a Mild Alcohol/Substance Use Disorder, 4–5 criteria present indicates a Moderate Alcohol/Substance Use Disorder, and 6 or more criteria present indicates a Severe Alcohol/Substance Use Disorder.

According to the DSM-5, an A/SUD is “a problematic pattern of alcohol [substance] use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by **at least two** of the following, occurring **within a 12-month period**.” The following are the first five criteria to be considered for a diagnosis of an A/SUD. The NE LAP has underlined crucial terms that must be considered in order to affirm the criteria has or has not been met. The term “recurrent” means two or more separate occasions and persistent means ongoing or prolonged. The NE LAP has added common examples of each criteria.

1. *Alcohol or Substance is often taken in larger amounts or over a longer period than was intended.*
NE LAP: The individual plans to have one or two drinks, but subsequently has more, or stays out longer than planned. An individual plans to take one pill from a past hydrocodone prescription to control current pain, but takes the medication on several occasions.
2. *There is a persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control alcohol or substance use.*
NE LAP: The individual wants to cut down or control their use of alcohol or substances in order to reduce or prevent alcohol or substance-related problems, i.e. “it would be better for me if I didn’t drink so much or so often.” An individual made an attempt to control their use or cut down the amount they were using, but were unsuccessful in maintaining a long-term change.
3. *A great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain alcohol or substances, use alcohol or substances, or recover from its effects.*
NE LAP: There is a preoccupation with alcohol or substances to make sure the alcohol or substance is available to use, which may include driving by the liquor store daily to buy alcohol or diverting medication from work. The individual may think about when they are going to be able to drink or use again, and they may experience hangovers, or other effects that preclude them from meeting personal, family, work, or community obligations.
4. *Craving, or a strong desire or urge to use alcohol or substance.*
NE LAP: The individual’s desire to use alcohol or substance goes well beyond just wanting to drink alcohol or use a substance. The person is compelled to drink or use the substance, and feel the need to use it to continue functioning, in some cases, in order to survive.
5. *Recurrent alcohol or substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill major role obligations at work, school, or home.*
NE LAP: Home, school or work obligations are neglected, missed or left incomplete due to being under the influence of alcohol or a substance, or recovering from the use of alcohol or a substance. This may include experiencing hangovers, blackouts, legal charges, or other consequences. Example: repeated incidents of calling in sick to work, especially after social events or weekends.

The conclusion to Alcohol Use Disorder – A Problematic Pattern, Part II will be in the NE LAP’s March 2020 newsletter.

If you are a licensed health or health-related service professional wanting more information about sobriety and recovery, please contact the NE LAP at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055 or visit our web site at www.lapne.org. If you would like to consult with the NE LAP, or schedule an assessment or an educational presentation, please ask for Michelle Hruska, NE LAP Coordinator, or Nicole Winkler, NE LAP Counselor.