



**The Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research**  
Evidence-Based Living

## ALCOHOLISM

# The Evidence on Alcoholics Anonymous

New research demonstrates AA works for many.

Posted Mar 18, 2020



Source: fizkes/Adobe Stock

More than 15 million Americans have an [alcohol-use disorder](#), and overuse of alcohol leads to nearly 90,000 deaths each year in the United States, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

[A new systematic review](#) by the Cochrane [Collaboration](#) takes a careful look at a decades-old treatment for [alcohol abuse](#): Alcoholics Anonymous. The review includes 27 studies with nearly 11,000 participants in total. The studies looked at whether the traditional format of Alcoholics Anonymous led to longer periods of abstinence from alcohol use;

some compared Alcoholics Anonymous to other types of [therapy](#) or group meetings.

Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA, was founded in 1935 on the idea that alcoholics could come together to support each other's sobriety. Today, there are more than 2 million AA members across the globe. The program is based on 12 steps that include admitting that alcohol is a problem in your life, apologizing for your wrongs, and striving to do better. One of the fundamental tenets of the program is that members continue attending meetings long after they have completed the 12 steps and that they mentor newer members.

On the whole, the new review found that the 12-step AA intervention led to higher rates of abstinence from alcohol over the long term compared to other treatments for alcoholism. One of the main reasons, according to the data, is that people continue to participate in AA for years after they have completed the 12-step program. (The review did not look at whether 12-step programs were effective for treating abuse of other drugs.)

The review also found that AA performed as well as other treatments for reducing the intensity of drinking alcohol and reducing alcohol-related consequences.

This new review offers an updated perspective. [A 2006 Cochrane review](#) did not find solid evidence that AA was more effective than any other type of alcohol treatment program.

The authors did note that AA does not work for everyone who tries it. In the discussion section of the paper, they note that a major strength of the program is its expansive range. With meetings offered in nearly every U.S. town and city and 180 countries, the organization provides a new social context for people who want to restructure their lives around avoiding alcohol.

The take home-message: Alcoholics Anonymous is an effective treatment for alcohol [addiction](#), in large part due to its broad reach and large membership.



### About the Author



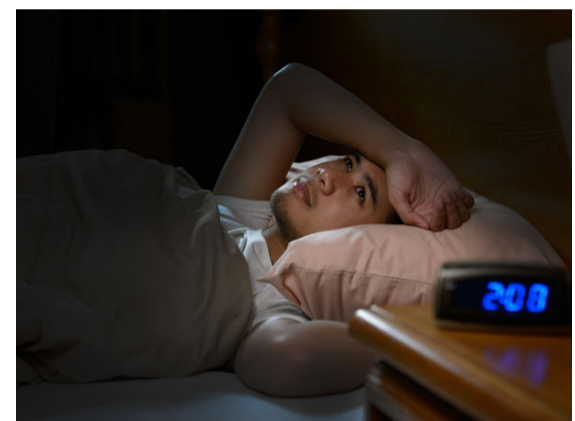
[The Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research \(BCTR\)](#) at Cornell University is focused on using research findings to improve health and well-being of people at all stages of life.

**Online:** [Bronfenbrenner Center website](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#)

### Read Next



[Don't Be the "Cool Parent" About Alcohol](#)



[How to Improve Your Sleep During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)



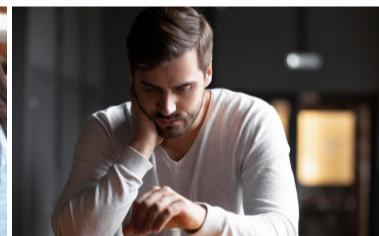
[Why AA is Bad Science... and What It Means for Treatment](#)



[Why Addiction Treatment Isn't "One Size Fits All"](#)



[A 12-Step Program That Has Helped Patients Transform](#)



[Heart Rate Variability \(HRV\) Biofeedback for Alcohol Abuse](#)

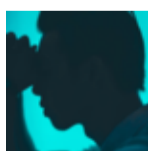


[The Drug Problem in the U.S. Is Not What We Think It Is](#)

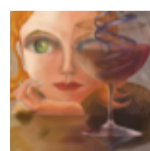


[The Alcoholism Riddle: Disease, Choice, or World View?](#)

### Alcoholism Essential Reads



[Deaths of Despair and the Role of Religion](#)



[Worried About Alcohol Use During the Pandemic?](#)

### Find Counselling

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.

City or Postcode