

## MEMORANDUM

**FROM:** HART/TEETER  
**DATE:** MAY 4, 2004  
**RE:** FACES AND VOICES OF RECOVERY PUBLIC SURVEY

*From April 19 to 22, Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Robert M. Teeter's Coldwater Corporation conducted a national survey among 801 American adults for the Faces & Voices of Recovery Campaign. The poll was conducted using random digit dialing (RDD) techniques with which individuals are selected using a probability sample design that gives all telephone numbers in the United States (both listed and unlisted) an equal chance to be included. The statistical margin of sampling error for the survey as a whole is  $\pm 3.46\%$ . The margin of sampling error for smaller subgroups will be larger than that and sampling error is not the only source of error or bias that could affect survey results. What follows are the major findings from the poll.*

A majority of Americans have been impacted by addiction to alcohol or other drugs according to this first comprehensive survey of the general public on recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs. Their experience is widespread, with people from all walks of life affected by addiction and over one-third knowing someone who is in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs. They agree that a strong stigma is associated with the disease of addiction and that the stigma extends even to people who have successfully sustained long-term recovery to addiction. Majorities say that discrimination against people in recovery is a problem in their community, and sizable minorities admit they would be less likely to hire an otherwise qualified job applicant if they learned that person were in recovery.

Given a moment to reflect on their views toward addiction and the recovery process, the public expresses a desire for change in laws, policies and attitudes, including an end to the ban against student loans and other financial aid for students with drug convictions. A hypothetical candidate for Congress proposing policies that prioritize preventing and treating addiction and supporting recovery was preferred by overwhelming majorities.

**Addiction to alcohol and other drugs has an impact on many, as does recovery.** A majority of Americans have been affected by addiction to alcohol or other drugs, including a 63% majority who say that addiction to alcohol or other drugs has had a great deal or some impact on their life, and a large proportion (38%) who say that addiction has had a *great deal* of impact on their life. Of those affected by addiction, 24% are affected by a parent's addiction, 11% by their children's addiction, and 29% by a close friend's addiction. The survey results reveal that people from all walks of life have been affected by addiction.

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The survey results also provide evidence that recovery is happening, as 38% of adults know a family member or close friend (or both) who is in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs.

**Stigma against people in recovery.** After stigma is defined as “something that detracts from the character or reputation of a person, a mark of disgrace,” two-thirds (67%) of the public believe that a stigma exists toward people in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs. Forty-five percent believe that there is a strong stigma toward people in recovery. It is clear the public desires to reduce the stigma associated with addiction: 74% say that when people are ashamed to talk to others about their own or a family member’s addiction, the attitude must change (61% feel strongly); only 19% say that this is acceptable.

**Evidence of widespread discrimination.** The survey findings provide evidence of widespread discrimination against people in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, as 43% of Americans say that they would be less likely to vote for a candidate for governor of their state who is in recovery. The survey defined someone in recovery as being free from the disease of addiction and no longer using alcohol or drugs.

If responsible for deciding who to hire for their company, a significant minority (27%) of adults admit that they would be less likely to hire an otherwise qualified job applicant just because they learned that candidate was in long-term recovery from addiction.

Most think that these patterns of discrimination should be changed. While 27% say that it is acceptable that companies are less likely to hire people who are in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs, a solid majority (65%) feels that this attitude should be changed and 47% feel strongly about the need for change. To illustrate the point, a 74% majority says that it was good that radio personality Rush Limbaugh had a job waiting for him when he returned from his most recent treatment for an addiction to prescription pain medications; only 20% think that this was bad.

**Overwhelming majorities say that discrimination against people in recovery is a problem.** When asked whether the situation is a problem in the United States today, three-quarters (75%) of Americans believe that people in recovery being denied medical, life, or other insurance coverage is a problem (47% believe it is a major problem). Similarly, an 80% majority say that people in recovery being denied jobs or promotions is a problem (42% major problem). Further, 52% say that people in recovery being denied government-backed student loans is a problem today (27% major problem).

**The public calls for changes in law and attitude.** When asked whether the current situation is acceptable or should be changed, few (28%) people say that it is acceptable that people seeking help for addiction often pay higher health insurance premiums and co-pays than do people who seek help for other diseases. A strong majority (65%) believes that this should be changed, with 51% feeling strongly about the need for change. When it comes to students with drug convictions being banned from receiving federal financial aid to pay for college, a similarly high proportion (67%) believe that this should be changed, including 49% who feel strongly about the need for change. Only 25% find this ban acceptable.

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By 63% to 28%, the public supports changing the law that bans students who have been arrested for drug possession from receiving student loans and other forms of financial aid. Rather than seeing a deterrent against drug possession, the vast majority views this policy as a deterrent against people who are now making the right decisions and trying to turn their life around.

**The survey findings reveal that most of the public would be more likely to vote for candidates who propose policies that prioritize treatment and recovery and reduce discrimination.** An 81% majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who proposes reallocating government spending to place a greater emphasis on prevention, education, treatment, and recovery support. The same proportion would be more likely to vote for a candidate who expanded programs to get treatment for drug users rather than locking them up.

- A 76% majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who proposed a law that required health insurance companies to cover recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs the same as other medical conditions.
- A 75% majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who called for an increase in federal government funding for programs to prevent and treat addiction and support recovery, as well as fund scientific research on the causes of addiction.
- A much smaller proportion (57%) would be more likely to support a candidate who called for tougher criminal penalties for drug users and stronger enforcement of the current laws, and 33% would be less likely to vote for such a candidate.

**Strong majorities say that a lack of treatment for addiction creates a problem in their community.** A 61% majority says that a lack of treatment and recovery programs for people addicted to alcohol and other drugs is a problem in their community, including one-third (32%) who believes that it causes a major problem. In addition, a 53% majority believes that discrimination against people in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs is a community problem (18% major problem, 35% minor problem).

Hart/Teeter is the bi-partisan effort of the polling organizations of veteran pollsters Peter D. Hart (D) and Robert Teeter (R), who have collaborated on numerous other projects, including the respected *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News polls.