

Admissions and Discharge Policies

Updating Admission and Discharge policies to be more inclusive of clients at different points in recovery or who are not ready for complete abstinence.

Some key aims of Los Angeles County's R95 Initiative are to lower barriers to substance use disorder (SUD) care and enhance retention in care. With that spirit in mind, admissions policies represent the front door of SUD treatment and discharge policies represent the back door, and both are essential opportunities to improve SUD treatment initiation and retention.



R95 Admission Policy

Just as primary care providers do not turn away patients with diabetes for having blood sugar levels that are too high, turning away individuals with SUDs for not being completely abstinent from substances before they enter into treatment is too high of a bar to set and often serves more as a barrier rather than a facilitator of care.



- ▶ The R95 Admission Policy supports specialty SUD treatment providers in Los Angeles County with establishing more flexible admission policies that allow for enrollment of individuals with SUD into treatment who may be at different points of their recovery and readiness for complete abstinence.
- ▶ This more nuanced approach to admissions takes the perspective that someone can both be interested in SUD treatment and also not yet ready/able to maintain complete abstinence from substances. This approach allows agencies to continue to support complete abstinence while also expanding their ability to serve other people with SUD who would benefit from treatment, even if they are not abstinent from all substances.

R95 Discharge Policy

Similarly, policies that discharge clients from SUD treatment due to a relapse on substances often amounts to turning people with SUD away when they most need treatment. While discharge may be an appropriate response to situations where individuals with SUD either use or return to using substances (e.g., aggression, property damage), there are also often other strategies that would allow people in these situations to remain in SUD treatment.



- ▶ The R95 Discharge Policy requires staff to consider other options before automatically discharging clients from SUD treatment for using substances during a treatment episode. In residential SUD treatment settings, these other options may include:
 - Differentiating between a “relapse” and a “lapse” where a lapse indicates someone who may have returned to substance use but remains interested in SUD treatment.
 - Providing separate spaces or using partitions to separate individuals who may have lapsed and returned to substance use from those who are in recovery and maintaining their abstinence.

- ▶ This does not mean that clients cannot be discharged from care under any circumstance or that SUD treatment agencies cannot have reasonable behavioral expectations of their clients, but rather aims to facilitate a culture within SUD treatment settings that recognizes that SUDs are chronic and relapsing conditions and that discharging someone for exhibiting the symptoms of their health condition should be a last resort rather than a first option.

- ▶ In addition to making SUD treatment agency-level policy changes, updating patient-facing materials such as Admissions Agreements and Toxicology (aka: drug testing) Agreements to



align with R95 admission and discharge principles is essential to actualizing these cultural changes to lower barrier SUD treatment systems that prioritize individualized recovery journeys as opposed to programmatic rules. This allows prospective and current patients to experience how their provider has embraced and actualized lower barrier admissions and higher barrier discharges.

While some admissions may be inappropriate and some discharges may be appropriate, R95 Admission Policies, Admission Agreements, Discharge Policies, and Toxicology Policies collectively set an SUD systems-level framework that encourages lower barrier approaches to specialty SUD treatment that aims to better maintain SUD clients in care, while still supporting SUD provider agencies with their life-saving work.

Guidance from Los Angeles County's Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (SAPC) on developing an R95 Admission Policy, Discharge Policy, and staff training presentations can be accessed via the links below:

Admission Policy guidance:

<http://ph.lacounty.gov/sapc/docs/public/r95/R95AdmissionPolicyTemplate.pdf>

Discharge Policy guidance:

<http://ph.lacounty.gov/sapc/docs/public/r95/R95DischargePolicyTemplate.pdf>

R95 Staff Training Presentation guidance:

<http://ph.lacounty.gov/sapc/docs/public/r95/R95%20SUD%20Treatment%20Staff%20Training>

Update Admissions Policy

Lowering the bar of admission policies to allow for enrollment of individuals into SUD treatment even if they may not be interested/ready for complete abstinence from substances.

Update Discharge Policy

Raising the bar of discharge policies so that there are more nuanced considerations before someone is discharged from treatment.

Update Admission Agreement

Empowering clients interested in treatment, including those who are not yet ready for complete abstinence, to engage with treatment services.

Update Toxicology Policy

Toxicology/drug testing is often used to help determine if someone should be admitted into or discharged from SUD care. Treating toxicology/drug tests as a helpful component of SUD treatment, but not as a prerequisite, can help to establish an SUD treatment culture that focuses more on maintaining people in treatment as opposed to kicking people out of care.

Train Staff

Engage staff in discussions about the why/what/how of these policy changes to help ensure they have a clear understanding of these more nuanced approaches to SUD treatment.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE R95 INITIATIVE bit.ly/R95Initiative

Visit RecoverLA.org

to learn more about our award-winning mobile-friendly resources, as well as a filterable service locator.

Go to SUDHelpLA.org

to locate a treatment provider near you with filters that make searching for specialty SUD services easy.