

New Poll Finds Maryland Voters Strongly Support Increased Access to Alcohol and Drug Addiction Treatment

Two-Thirds of Maryland Voters Support an Increased Alcohol Tax to Expand Treatment

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BALTIMORE—Maryland voters strongly believe alcohol and drug addiction treatment are effective and support providing greater access to such programs, according to a new statewide poll commissioned by the Open Society Institute—Baltimore.

Maryland voters would even support an increase in the alcohol tax to pay for expanded alcohol and drug treatment. Support for the tax increase crosses political party lines.

The statewide poll results come as mayors and health officials from nine cities will attend a major two-day conference in Baltimore June 7 and 8 to share successful strategies about drug addiction treatment. The conference—called "Cities on the Right Track: Building Public Drug Treatment Systems"—is being sponsored by the OSI-Baltimore, the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and the City of Baltimore.

"This poll tells us that Marylanders know treatment works and believe more people should have access to it," said Diana Morris, director of OSI-Baltimore. "It also tells us they believe it is so important that they are willing to pay for it with a tax increase on alcohol."

The statewide survey found that 69 percent of Maryland voters believe alcohol and drug treatment are effective in helping people overcome addiction—a number that rises to 72 percent of those who have known someone with an addiction. Overall, 67 percent believe that drug treatment is a better option than prison to stop someone from using illegal drugs.

The poll also reveals the depth of the addiction problem as two-thirds of Maryland voters say they personally have known someone with an alcohol or drug addiction. This personal experience with addiction crosses all lines, regardless of gender, race, income, region or political party.

The survey findings also reveal a treatment gap in Maryland as many people appear not to have access to treatment when they need it. Among voters who have known someone with an addiction problem, 26 percent report that the person was unable to obtain treatment. As many as 39 percent were unable to access publicly funded treatment, according to the survey.

Roughly two-thirds of voters support three different policy options to expand alcohol and drug treatment:

- 67 percent said they favored private insurance covering treatment
- 63 percent said they supported increased public funds for treatment
- 67 percent said they supported a tax increase on alcohol

The poll found that Republicans approve of a proposed alcohol tax increase by a 17-point margin, while Independents are almost two-to-one in favor, and Democrats support it more than three-to-one.

The poll also found that 56 percent of voters who intend to support Gov. Robert Ehrlich this November against either Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley or Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan also support an alcohol tax to fund improved access to treatment.

Such a tax also is strongly supported by undecided voters in the gubernatorial race: 69 percent of undecided voters in an Ehrlich/O'Malley match and 68 percent in an Ehrlich/Duncan contest support an alcohol tax increase to fund treatment.

Expanding access to treatment could be a factor in this fall's election. Forty-one percent of Maryland voters said they would be more likely to vote for a state legislative candidate who supports increased availability of alcohol and drug addiction treatment, compared to only 7 percent who would be less likely to do so. One in six voters would be much more likely to vote for a candidate who supports expanded treatment – a potentially powerful voter swing.

The poll, conducted by OpinionWorks in Annapolis, surveyed more than 1,214 likely Maryland voters in the election by telephone from March 31 to April 5. The survey has a maximum potential sampling error of $\pm 2.8\%$ at a 95% confidence level. That means that 95% of the time, the survey results would differ from the actual views of likely voters statewide by no more than 2.8% if every likely voter in Maryland had been interviewed.

OpinionWorks' principal, Steve Raabe, has been writing and conducting surveys of Maryland voters since 1992. From 2001 to 2005 he was the methodologist and primary author of the polling program at *The Sun*.

The Cities on the Right Track conference will feature Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley, Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown, and Providence Mayor David Cicilline. Health officials from Baltimore, San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York, Detroit, and Seattle also will present effective practices.

At the conference, philanthropist George Soros, founder of the Open Society Institute, also will discuss the importance of drug addiction treatment in creating lasting change in cities. The Open Society Institute–Baltimore has provided substantial funding to strengthen and expand Baltimore's public drug treatment system, which is managed by the quasi-public Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems (BSAS).

Since 1998, Baltimore has made it a priority to build an expanded drug treatment system and has mobilized broad public support for drug treatment among city, state and private funders. The result: The city has significantly increased the capacity of its public drug treatment system.

Despite that expansion, thousands of Baltimore residents still need treatment, and additional funding needs to be found so that ultimately treatment on-demand is a reality in the city.

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Founded by philanthropist George Soros, OSI-Baltimore is a private operating foundation that supports a grantmaking, educational and capacity-building program to expand justice and opportunity for Baltimore residents. With support from a range of investors, its current work focuses on helping Baltimore's youth succeed, reducing the social and economic costs of incarceration, tackling drug addiction, and building a corps of Community Fellows to bring innovative ideas to Baltimore's underserved communities.