Press Release

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**SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Addiction and the Brain**

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) maintains that addiction is a chronic but treatable medical condition involving changes to brain circuitry that involves reward, stress, and self-control. These findings have assisted researchers in identifying neurobiological abnormalities that can be targeted with therapeutic intervention. It is also leading to improved methods of delivering addiction treatments in the healthcare system, and it has reduced stigma.

Informed Americans no longer view addiction as a moral failing, and more and more policymakers are recognizing that punishment is an ineffective and inappropriate tool for addressing a person's drug problems. Treatment is what is needed.

Effective medications are available to help in the treatment of opioid use disorders and have been shown in study after study to reduce illicit drug use and its consequences. The highly potent drugs currently claiming so many lives, such as heroin and fentanyl, exert their effects on sensitive brain circuitry into thinking they are more important than natural rewards like food, sex, or parenting.

Addiction as a brain disorder model maintains people try drugs but most do not start to use compulsively or develop an addiction. Studies are identifying gene variants that confer resilience or risk for addiction, as well as environmental factors in early life that affect that risk. This knowledge will enable development of precisely targeted prevention and treatment strategies, just as it is making possible the larger domain of personalized medicine.

This medical model of addiction as a brain disorder or disease has its critics. Some claim that viewing addiction this way minimizes its important social and environmental causes, as though saying addiction is a disorder of brain circuits means that social stresses like loneliness, poverty, violence, and other psychological and environmental factors do not play an important role. In fact, the dominant theoretical framework in addiction science today is the *biopsychosocial framework*, which recognizes the complex interactions between biology, behavior, and environment.

The brain is linked to what we think, feel, and do; and the structure and function of the brain are shaped by environments and behaviors, as well as by genetics, hormones, age, and other

biological factors. It is the complex interactions among these factors that underlie disorders like addiction as well as the ability to recover from them. Understanding the ways social and economic deprivation raise the risks for drug use and its consequences is central to prevention science and is a crucial part of the biopsychosocial framework; so is learning how to foster resilience through prevention interventions that foster more healthy family, school, and community environments.

Addiction can be viewed as many things, a disorder caused by dysregulation of brain circuits, a maladaptive response to environmental stressors, a developmental disorder or a learned behavior. According to NIDA, when addressing addiction, the myriad factors that contribute to it—biological, psychological, behavioral, societal, economic, etc. must be taken into consideration. But viewing it as a treatable medical problem from which people can and do recover is crucial for enabling a public-health–focused response that ensures access to effective treatments and lessens the stigma surrounding a condition that afflicts nearly 10 percent of Americans at some point in their lives.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE" to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about this NIDA report, please visit https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/noras-blog/2018/03/what-does-it-mean-when-we-call-addiction-brain-disorder. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition.