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What is recovery? A working definition from the Betty Ford Institute

Abstract

There is an unknown but very large number of individuals who have experienced and successfully resolved dependence on alcohol or other drugs. These individuals refer to their new sober and productive lifestyle as "recovery." Although widely used, the lack of a standard definition for this term has hindered public understanding and research on the topic that might foster more and better recovery-oriented interventions. To this end, a group of interested researchers, treatment providers, recovery advocates, and policymakers was convened by the Betty Ford Institute to develop an initial definition of recovery as a starting point for better communication, research, and public understanding. Recovery is defined in this article as a voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health, and citizenship. This article presents the operational definitions, rationales, and research implications for each of the three elements of this definition.