



THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Michael R. Bloomberg

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.

Mayor

Commissioner

nyc.gov/health

Dear Health Care Professional:

Alcohol-related problems are common in patients seen by primary care providers. Although most adults drink safely, some 25,000 New Yorkers are hospitalized for alcohol-related illness and injury each year, and more than 1,500 die. An estimated 15% of adult New Yorkers—nearly 900,000 people—report excessive drinking. Most of these individuals (about 70%) see a physician regularly. You and other primary care providers are uniquely positioned to intervene and help excessive drinkers cut down or stop using alcohol.

Problem drinking includes heavy and binge drinking, and in some cases, mixing alcohol with medications. It plays an important role in many chronic diseases, leading to higher morbidity and mortality if untreated.

Primary care providers can identify and help people with problem drinking, thereby mitigating the health impact of excess alcohol use. While many perceive it difficult to address alcohol dependency during a routine office visit, you can, in fact, make a difference in the lives of such patients. Even when patients do not meet criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence, they can still benefit from interventions to cut down. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene strongly recommends the following:

- **Ask every patient about alcohol using a simple 4-question screening tool (CAGE-AID).**
- **Provide clear, personalized advice and set mutually acceptable goals.**
- **Offer information, and treatment referrals.**

These techniques, known as brief intervention, are outlined in this Action Kit. Your Health Department representative is visiting you to discuss ways of applying these methods, clinical tools and materials in your practice. Thank you for your dedication and contribution to the health of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Frieden, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner
New York City Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene

Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D.
Executive Deputy Commissioner for Mental Hygiene
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