

Recovery in the Real World

Australian Life in Recovery National Survey Sheds Light on the Lives of Persons in Recovery from Addiction to Alcohol and Other Drugs

By Jacquie Grant - Relationship Manager, South Pacific Private

In 2012, the US recovery advocacy organisation, Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) published the findings of an online survey of people in recovery to measure the changes in a range of aspects of their wellbeing from the time of their active use to their recovery.

This survey was of great significance as it represented the **first-ever USA nationwide survey of persons in recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs**. Conducted by Alexandre Laudet, PhD, the survey documented dramatic improvements in all areas of life for people in recovery from addiction and documented the heavy costs of addiction to the individual and to the nation. Importantly, and also for the first time, it measured, tracked and quantified the effects of recovery over time (to the individual and to the nation).

To do this the survey gathered information on 3,228 participants' socio-demographics, physical/mental health, substance use, and recovery history, as well as 44 items representing experiences and indices of functioning in work, finances, legal, family, social and citizenship domains.

The results of the survey were empowering, significant and revealing. Some of the key statistics that emerged clearly indicated that addiction recovery is associated with dramatic improvements in all areas of life but also that there are definitive long term benefits that impact individuals, but also society. This survey documented, for the first time, that investing in Recovery not only makes sense, but is actually critical to the health of the nation.

Some of the impacts of the USA Survey include:

- Involvement in illegal acts and involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g. arrests, incarceration, DWIs) decreased by about ten-fold
- Steady employment in addiction recovery increases by over 50% greater relative to active addiction
- Frequent use of costly emergency room departments decreases ten-fold
- Paying bills on time and paying back personal debt doubles
- Planning for the future (e.g. saving for retirement) increases nearly three-fold
- Involvement in domestic violence (as victim or perpetrator) decreases dramatically
- Participation in family activities increases by 50%
- Volunteering in the community increases nearly three-fold compared to in active addiction

- Voting increases significantly
- Reports of untreated emotional/mental health problems decrease over four-fold
- Twice as many participants further their education or training than in active addiction

(Source: www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/life-recovery-survey)

In early 2013 a group of researchers at Turning Point (part of Eastern Health) began to consider whether the same implications might be true of the Australian Recovery demographic.

They approached FAVOR and with their support and blessing began to determine how this American survey might fit in the Australian context.

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To date, it is true that there is relatively little evidence (particularly in Australia) about what the experiences are of people who have made this transition in their lives. There is regular media coverage, documented stories and editorial dedicated to active addiction and its impact on families, livelihoods, society, welfare and more. However, by comparison, very little coverage is dedicated to those in Recovery and the transformative nature of that Recovery financially, psychically, emotionally, educationally and economically.

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Recovery from alcohol and drug addiction is now widely recognised as a journey that takes place over time and in a multitude of ways that reflect personal circumstances, supports and resources. Turning Point saw an opportunity to mirror the insights now available about the American Recovery population and to raise awareness of our growing nationwide reality regarding addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

In conjunction with South Pacific Private, they began a journey to pilot and develop an Australian version and to capture the Recovery experiences of the Australian population.

As a first step to documenting the benefits of recovery to the individual and to the nation, Turning Point and South Pacific Private carefully designed the Australian version of the Life in Recovery survey, but were also conscious to ensure that the two surveys (American and Australian) were closely enough aligned so as to be able to compare and cross-reference the outcomes.

The survey, conducted both online using a tool called Survey Monkey, and in print format, was conducted between November 1 and December 31 2013 and gathered information on participants' socio-

demographics, physical/mental health, substance use, and Recovery history.

In addition, the survey also collected information regarding social networks and social media which both Turning Point and South Pacific Private believed to be particularly important in reference to an individuals' recovery journey.

These questions focused upon the following:

- **Health and quality of life**
- **Substance use**
- **Treatment and Recovery**
- **Recovery supports**
- **Life experiences in active addiction and recovery**
- **Social networks, peer networks and identity**

A total of 573 surveys were completed and respondents represented a broad range of individual characteristics, recovery durations and life histories.

Currently, South Pacific Private and Turning Point are collaborating to finalise the survey results; to be released in early 2015 in full.

The purpose of this article is to highlight our early findings and to begin the discussion that is required around Recovery treatment, stigma and the state of the nation as regards Recovery statistics. They hope this survey will contribute to educating the public, governments and treatment services about recovery. In addition, through the release of this survey in 2015 they hope to help address stigma and the discrimination of people in or seeking recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

"My addiction was hell. My Recovery has been amazing. It took a long time to feel a part of the world when coming out of addiction. I have been able to break the cycle."

Early key statistical indicators:

- Marked improvements in financial situation from active addiction to recovery signified by; paying bills on time, having a place to live, credit ratings, and paying taxes.

- Marked improvements in changes to family and social life from active addiction to recovery specifically underpinned by a dramatic reduction in incidences of family violence (from around half of participants during active addiction to less than 10% in recovery).
- Marked differences in health functioning with clear improvements in self-care activities such as GP visits, regular dental check-ups, improved diet and nutrition and regular exercise.
- 90% reduction in imprisonment from active addiction to recovery as well as dramatic reductions in offences such as driving under the influence (DUI) (82.9% reduced to under 5%).
- Striking number of comments representing support of 12-Step groups such as AA. In conjunction, there were also a number of respondents who spoke about the importance of blended support from both mutual aid groups and professional treatment services.

It is clear, even from these preliminary survey findings, that the long term benefits of Recovery not only benefit the individual and their families but also reverberate on a much more widely reaching scale. The scope of impact includes the legal and criminal system, the health care system and emergency services, social / welfare services and other support services and finally, the economy and overall mental health of our nation.

Summary – A Life in Recovery Unveiled

In summary, this survey will document a cross-section of the Recovery population in Australia in terms of the many costs of active addiction to the individual and to society but also, notably, the dramatic improvements people experience in all areas of life once they are in addiction recovery.

The full survey report and findings will be published in early 2015. If you would like to receive a copy of the report in full please email Jacquie Grant (email below).

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For more information regarding the American Life in Recovery Survey please visit: **www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/life-recovery-survey**

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