

WHITE PAPER: ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Parents of Addicted Loved Ones (PAL) uses an evidence-based, faith-based program to save and change lives. When families first walk into PAL, they are often completely broken. They fear their loved one may die if nothing changes. PAL provides critical emotional support and a simple, loving program of action for parents to follow. As parents learn healthier ways to deal with the issues surrounding substance use disorder and begin to set healthy boundaries, their loved ones—no longer enabled in their substance use disorder—often seek recovery. All family members (ages 18 and over) of the individual suffering from substance use disorder are welcome.

The program

PAL is a support group of parents helping parents that uses a structured curriculum created by professionals in the treatment and recovery industry. Weekly meetings offer SUD education and support at no charge for parents and family members who are trying save an adult son or daughter from an SUD. The focus is on educating and supporting the PAL attendee rather than the individual who is using.

Parents of those who are in active use are often paralyzed by a fear that if they change their behavior, something horrible will happen to their child. As a result, parents get locked into a cycle of enabling that is difficult to break. Parents, through no fault of their own, will bankrupt themselves, endanger their marriages, and sacrifice their own health in the name of “helping” a loved one suffering from an SUD. The fear and guilt compounds as their actions continue to prove ineffective.


PAL’s curriculum-based meetings center on educating families on all the topics common to their situation—how to respond to guilt and fear, how to discern between healthy helping and enabling, what are the common behavior patterns of a person struggling with SUD in recovery vs. not in recovery, and many more. For the first time in years, parents are able to find emotional relief, set healthy boundaries, and experience genuine connection with others. Ironically, the parents getting healthy is often what opens the door for the person struggling with SUD to change their life as well.

The history

The PAL model was created and started by Mike Speakman, an Arizona-based Licensed Substance Abuse Counselor, in 2006. He created the curriculum at the



Kim Humphrey, PAL Executive Director, (center) with founder Mike Speakman, LISAC, (right) at a PAL event.

suggestion of some of his recovery clients, who saw the need for something to help their families. The demand was great and the number of meetings grew until it was apparent the program answered a true need in the community. Parents of Addicted Loved Ones formed as a nonprofit in March 2015. 



PAL let (my mom) know that she wasn't alone and that it wasn't her fault. More than anything, PAL taught her that acceptance doesn't mean that you are giving up on your child.

-Person in recovery

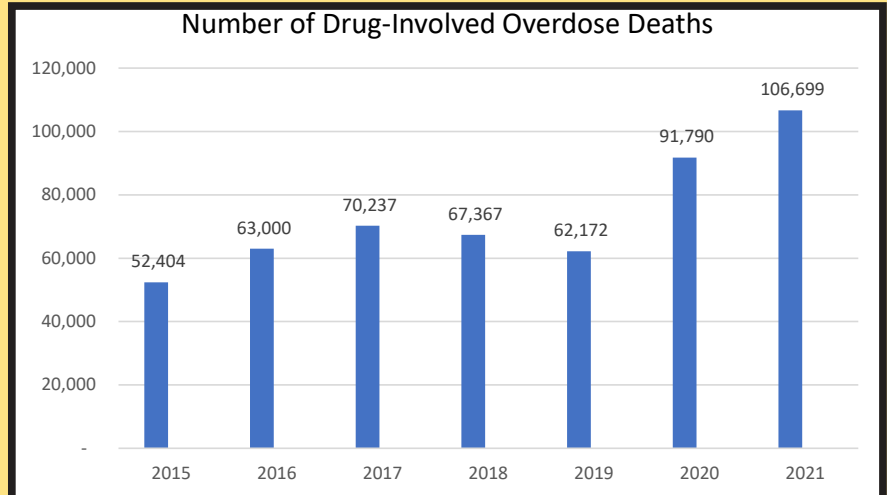
The problem

The United States is in the grip of an unprecedented health crisis.

For every death and for every single individual derailed by drug abuse, there are multiple lives lingering in the shadows, teetering on ruin as collateral damage – families of the addicted.

The toll taken is severe, as families – driven by love and desperation – find their own lives driven to ruin in a path parallel to their addicted loved one. The family fabric is destroyed on many levels:


- **Financial** – The cost to parents of an adult child dealing with SUD can easily drain family bank accounts: supporting adult children with places to live, food and phones; unrelenting theft on behalf of the loved one suffering from SUD desperate to fund their habit; unsuccessful stays in treatment and recovery centers; retirement accounts are drained, and parents often driven to financial ruin.
- **Physical** – Not only does the person with SUD suffer physically, but it is common for family members to experience life-threatening health issues related to stress, including cardiac problems, high blood pressure and cancer.
- **Emotional** – As if the financial and physical impact isn't enough, the destruction includes far reaching emotional issues. Marriages fail. Other children fall through the cracks. Mental illness occurs. All are



The number of deaths due to drug overdoses rose from 62,172 in 2019 to 106,699 in 2021 (CDC, 2023). Americans are now more likely to die from a drug overdose than a car accident.

common symptoms of a family struggling to with a loved one suffering from SUD without having healthy coping skills.

But there is hope.

A study based in Georgia indicates that families have the **MOST DIRECT** influence over the addicted (*Jaffe, Meyer & Stonebraker, Treatment Parameters and Relapse in an Enthusiastic Sobriety IOP For Adolescents and Young Adults*). The health of the family has a direct impact on the health of the person with SUD, and ultimately may be the most meaningful path to recovery – not just for the family, but for the person struggling with SUD. 

The facts:

- **The nation's overdose epidemic continues to change and become worse. The epidemic affects every state and now is driven by illicit fentanyl, fentanyl analogs, methamphetamine and cocaine, often in combination or in adulterated forms.** (AMA, 2022)
- **Alcohol and drugs are involved in about 80% of offenses leading to incarceration in the United States.** (National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCAAD), 2015)
- **DEA lab testing reveals that 6 out of every 10 pills with fentanyl contain potentially lethal doses. The DEA is now seizing well over 20 million pills annually.** (DEA counterfeit pills fact sheet 2022)
- **More people are diagnosed with substance use disorder** in the U.S. than from all types of cancer combined.
- **The cost of substance abuse (not including tobacco) is \$343 billion per year**, the result of health care, crime, and lost work productivity. Not included is the price to society that goes beyond financial costs, including the spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C; deaths from overdose; effects on unborn children; unemployment, domestic abuse, divorce and homelessness. (*National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2017*)
- **SUD burdens communities**, with strains from economic loss, heightened demand for health and mental health services, decreased safety, higher overdose and suicide deaths, and increased law enforcement training and incarceration rates.

How it works

Weekly group meetings – The PAL program is built on weekly meetings, held at no cost to participants, led by trained peer volunteer facilitators who have all experienced the addiction of a loved one. Using a model of parents helping parents, the educational component consists of nine core lessons, plus supplemental lessons and occasional guest speakers. Meetings cover various topics of addiction and recovery with the goal of building the behavioral and communication tools families need when dealing with the stressful situations they face when their adult child suffers from addiction. Individuals can attend until they feel empowered to handle their situation.

Family Education Seminars – PAL hosts seminars to raise awareness about topics including substance use disorder, mental health services and suicide prevention.

Support – PAL's dedicated volunteers also speak about the organization to local service organizations and at state and county conferences, take phone calls from people seeking help, lead training for volunteer facilitators and host a robust website full of resources.

To date, the organization's growth has been organic, through word-of-mouth or from website searches and media exposure. National coverage has significantly increased website traffic and inquiries about groups, including the cover story of Money magazine. The organization has been featured in more than 120 broadcast and print news stories across the country over the years.

That growth is continuing to increase at an astounding rate. There are currently over 170 groups, 4 virtual

meetings, Spanish meetings and the organization is now represented in 38 states.

Expanding beyond the borders of the United States is happening as we have one virtual meeting in the U.K. and requests to start meetings in Canada.

We do all this, and maintain our conviction that the services of PAL will be provided to all participants at no cost. 🌍



PAL media coverage extends from the Washington Post to the Juneau Empire to the cover story on Money magazine and to TV stations all over the country - PAL is answering a deep need.

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“We have indeed been loving our son to death, loving him without boundaries.”

- PAL Parent

WHAT MAKES PAL DIFFERENT?

What sets PAL apart from other organizations that work with families of addicts/alcoholics is our evidence-based two-part meeting structure:

1. **Educational component** – Rather than leaving the family to educate themselves outside of meetings, every PAL meeting has an educational component featuring proven curriculum which addresses the effects of substance use disorder on families/individuals, and informs families of healthy responses to their loved one's behavior.

2. **Peer-to-peer support** – Rather than leaving a family to seek suggestions before or after meetings, PAL encourages cross-talk and suggestions to take place during the meeting. Our experience has shown this approach greatly improves the likelihood of family members being willing to change their behavior and thus improve their lives.

We believe that both elements of PAL meetings are critical to effecting change in a family's situation over time, and continued program evaluation from researchers at Northern Arizona University (NAU) confirms this to be true.



The proof

Evidence-based training: An independent evaluation conducted by Northern Arizona University professors Dr. Cindy Scott-Janicik, EdD and Kristen Alamiz, MEd, MSW, LCSW, found that PAL is remarkably successful in helping families find a healthy means to deal with adult addiction.

“The PAL curriculum is strongly rooted in a clinical practice that emphasizes an understanding of adult development and family dynamics. In addition, the strengths-based perspective used in the PAL curriculum speaks to Family Systems Perspectives and some of the most widely applied Motivational Theory therapies used in addiction treatment today.”

From the reports: Findings from the review further suggest that part of PAL’s success lies in the program’s ability to move beyond the philosophy of traditional programs that advocate an abrupt, seemingly callous end of enabling and co-dependency. Instead, PAL focuses on helping parents set firm boundaries, with love; an approach that is often more in-line with parents’ emotional limitations. The curriculum



NAU researcher Dr. Cindy Scott-Janicik reports on the findings of the remarkable effectiveness of PAL, using a combined evidence-based curriculum and peer-to-peer support.

also provides parents the option of a pathway that allows the addict to move back into the family structure once the destructive behavior ends.”

Researchers also found that “the complementary nature of PAL places the program in a unique position to serve as a referral resource for governmental agencies (e.g., police department, fire departments) struggling to help community members parent adult addicts.”

Key report findings include:

- The PAL curriculum is strongly rooted in a clinical practice that emphasizes an understanding of adult development and family dynamics.
- Helped improve the participants’ mental and physical health.



PAL is gaining a reputation as content experts in the area of addiction and its impact on the family. Kim Humphrey, Executive Director, moderates a panel on “Trends, Treatment and Tools: Confronting Arizona’s Opioid Epidemic.”

- Provided participants with practical strategies to stop enabling their loved one’s addiction and to set firm boundaries.
- Provided participants with strategies for supporting their loved one’s recovery.

The most recent report published July 2021 used pre- and post-tests to measure the impact of the PAL curriculum not only on members, but on their addicted loved ones. The results have some exciting implications, indicating that PAL members:

- Were less likely to engage in enabling and co-dependency behaviors.
- Felt more hopeful about their future.
- Expressed an improvement in their sense of well-being and that they felt happier.
- Their addicted loved one was less likely to misuse substances.

The final point indicates that families who participate in the PAL program could impact not only their own health, but that of their loved one as well. 🌍