

Position on Faith-Based Initiatives

The Legal Action Center supports the view that faith-based organizations should be encouraged to provide quality alcohol and drug treatment and prevention services. Religious organizations play an important role in reducing alcohol and drug problems and many faith-based organizations run excellent addiction treatment and prevention programs. Additionally, spirituality is a key part of many self-help groups that have assisted hundreds of thousands of people achieve sobriety and remain in recovery.

At the same time, faith-based alcohol and drug programs must be held accountable to the same standards of care, performance and licensure or certification as all other licensed or certified programs so that patients receive appropriate, quality care for this medical condition. The American Medical Association has recognized alcohol and drug addiction as a disease for a half-century, and ground-breaking studies by the National Institutes on Drug Abuse and Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism have identified a relationship between addiction and both genetics and persistent changes in brain structure and function. Just as with health and medical care for other illnesses, States must have the power to require uniform licensing or certification of all addiction treatment programs, including those provided by faith-based groups, to avert malpractice and maximize the life-saving power of these services. Indeed, many faith-based programs currently operate effectively around the country while being held accountable to such standards. The federal government should not undermine the current practice of States to license or certify treatment programs and credential staff.

Similarly, faith-based drug and alcohol treatment and prevention programs that receive federal funding should conform to principles of religious tolerance and inclusiveness. Specifically, programs receiving federal funding should refrain from proselytizing clients and should deliver services to a person regardless of his or her religious affiliation or beliefs. Additionally, faith-based programs should not discriminate based on religious beliefs when hiring staff for their programs.

Within the parameters articulated above, our nation should support and expand funding for the full continuum of quality alcohol and drug treatment and prevention services that meet performance and other professional standards, regardless of whether the provider is faith-based.