

Q. What is community reinforcement approach?

A. Community reinforcement approach (CRA) is a multifaceted behavioral treatment for the achievement and sustainment of alcohol abstinence. CRA involves making major lifestyle changes across all areas of living (i.e., relationships, recreational activities, and vocation). Treatment sessions focus on monitoring alcohol use, prioritizing problems, and setting clear and specific target goals. Alcohol avoidance, alcohol refusal, problem-solving, and assertiveness skills are also taught. Treatment is collaborative and customizable to individual patient needs. It is delivered through 60-minute, individual counseling sessions over 24 weeks (Budney & Higgins, 1998).

Q. What is the treatment model underlying CRA for alcohol use disorder (AUD)?

A. CRA is based on operant conditioning established by B. F. Skinner. Operant conditioning is a type of associative learning, in which the consequence of a behavior either increases or decreases the likelihood of future participation in that behavior. Skinner found that punishment was not an effective means of changing behavior. Azrin applied these learning principles to the treatment of alcohol and created CRA. He emphasized reinforcing sober social networks and engaging in positive, alcohol free activities (Azrin, 1976; Meyers, Roozen, & Smith, 2011).

Q. Is CRA recommended as a treatment for AUD in the Military Health System (MHS)?

A. **Yes.** The 2015 VA/DoD *Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Substance Use Disorders* gives the highest strength of recommendation (Strong For) for CRA in the treatment of patients with AUD.

The MHS relies on the VA/DoD clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) to inform best clinical practices. The CPGs are developed under the purview of clinical experts and are derived through a transparent and systematic approach that includes, but is not limited to, systematic reviews of the literature on a given topic and development of recommendations using a graded system that takes into account the overall quality of the evidence and the magnitude of the net benefit of the recommendation. A further description of this process and CPGs on specific topics can be found on the VA clinical practice guidelines website

Q. Do other authoritative reviews recommend CRA as a treatment for AUD?

A. **No.** Other authoritative reviews have not substantiated the use of CRA as a treatment for AUD.

Several other recognized organizations conduct systematic reviews and evidence syntheses on psychological health topics using similar grading systems as the VA/DoD CPGs. These include the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) and Cochrane.

- AHRQ: No reports on CRA for AUD were identified.
- Cochrane: No systematic reviews of CRA for AUD were identified.

Q. What conclusions can be drawn about the use of CRA as a treatment for AUD in the MHS?

A. The 2015 VA/DoD *Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Substance Use Disorders* strongly recommends CRA for the treatment of AUD. It is unclear which front-line treatments for AUD, including psychotherapy and medications, are more effective for which patients, under which circumstances, and in which combinations. Clinicians should consider several factors when choosing a front-line treatment with their patient. Treatment decisions should take into account practical considerations such as availability and patient preference that might influence treatment engagement and retention.

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References

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