

THE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP OCCUPATIONS AND STANDARDS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (AOSC)

Substance Use Counselor National Occupational Framework

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The nonprofit Urban Institute is dedicated to elevating the debate on social and economic policy. For nearly five decades, Urban scholars have conducted research and offered evidence-based solutions that improve lives and strengthen communities across a rapidly urbanizing world. Their objective research helps expand opportunities for all, reduce hardship among the most vulnerable, and strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

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Introduction to Using This Document

Under the Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence award, the Urban Institute leads the Occupations and Standards work. One of the main objectives of Urban's project is to create high-quality, well-researched, consensus-based work process schedules that are nonproprietary and widely available. This document is a product of that work and contains three sections: the occupational overview, the work process schedule, and the related technical instruction.

The **occupational overview** is a general introduction, including alternative job titles, any prerequisites, and, if applicable, the total number of hours needed to complete a time-based or hybrid program.

The **work process schedule** outlines the major job functions, competencies, and/or hours an apprentice completes in a registered apprenticeship program. It outlines what apprentices are expected to learn on the job with the support of a mentor or journeyworker, including both core competencies and those deemed optional by experts in the field. The work process schedule is the foundational document guiding a program.

Urban works with numerous experts to ensure the content is thoroughly researched and vetted to reflect the expectations of industry, educators, unions, and other stakeholders for this occupation. Sponsors and others involved in apprenticeship can use the work process schedule as their program standards with assurances it has been approved by experts in the field.

The **related technical instruction** presents considerations for the coursework that apprentices will undertake to supplement on-the-job learning. It is intended to serve as a reference to sponsors exploring their options for the accompanying classroom, virtual, or hybrid training.

How to Use the Work Process Schedule

Sponsors can adapt the work process schedule to accommodate their needs for competency- or time-based or hybrid programs. In a **competency-based** apprenticeship, sponsors assess apprentices' progress across core and optional competencies in the work process schedule. In a **time-based** apprenticeship, apprentices complete a predetermined number of hours across major job functions and the program overall. In a **hybrid** apprenticeship, sponsors monitor apprentices' hours spent on major job functions and assess their proficiency across competencies.

Each program type has a different method of assessment:

- **For a competency-based program**, apprentices engage in activities and make progress toward proficiency in the identified competencies. Sponsors overseeing apprentices' work assess their successful mastery of the outlined competencies using the following rating scale:

4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)

3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)

2—Completed the task with significant assistance

1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task

0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn't covered, etc.)

The competencies may be completed in any order. Apprentices must perform at a level 4 or 3 in all competencies listed as “core” to complete the apprenticeship program successfully.

- **For a time-based program**, sponsors monitor apprentices' completion of hours in training across major job functions. The total number of hours recommended for this occupation is listed in the occupational overview and is based on guidance from the US Department of Labor. Generally, apprentices must have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will provide apprentices with supervised work experience and allocate the total number of hours across the major job functions to adequately train their apprentices.
- **The hybrid approach** blends both competency- and time-based strategies. Sponsors measure apprentices' skills acquisition through a combination of completing the minimum hours of on-the-job learning and successfully demonstrating identified competencies. Sponsors will assess apprentices' proficiencies as described for competency-based programs with a rating scale of 0–4 for every core competency. Generally, apprentices have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will document apprentices' completion within a minimum and a maximum range of hours assigned for each major job function.

Substance Use Counselor Occupational Overview

Occupational Purpose and Context

Substance use counselors assess, monitor, support, and counsel individuals with substance use disorders. They may also assist and provide referrals for clients with co-occurring mood and behavioral disorders. Substance use counselors work with individuals and their support systems to assist with treatment, engage in relapse prevention, make referrals to other community services, and evaluate recovery progress. Substance use counselors use trauma-informed care and evidence-based practices to support clients at every step of the recovery process.

The work setting for substance use counselors varies. Substance use counselors may work in outpatient centers, hospitals, residential treatment facilities, medication for opioid use disorder treatment facilities, or individual private practices.

Potential Job Titles

Substance use counselor, substance abuse counselor, substance use therapist, drug and alcohol counselor, addiction counselor, addiction therapist, addiction specialist, behavioral health counselor, and certified alcoholism and substance abuse counselor

Apprenticeship Prerequisites

To become a substance use counselor, candidates must typically earn at least a baccalaureate degree in psychology, social work, human services, or a related field through an accredited institution of higher education. In the past, entry-level positions could be filled by individuals with a high school diploma or a GED. However, the field of substance use counseling is trending toward greater educational requirements for counselors. Additionally, the movement from the fee-for-service reimbursement model toward value-based payment arrangements means substance use treatment programs are often required to have a certain number of credentialed or licensed counselors on staff, requiring more advanced degrees.

Two national organizations, the Association for Addiction Professionals (NAADAC) and the International Credentialing & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC), manage credentialing for substance use counselors. Individuals can still receive entry-level credentials from NAADAC and IC&RC with a high school

diploma, GED, or associate degree. However, it is recommended that this apprenticeship program be completed alongside a baccalaureate degree program.

Many employers are interested in candidates who have personal experience with substance use disorders or experience working with substance use disorders, though these are not required. When applicable, states and employers typically require that an individual have spent a set number of years in recovery before practicing as a substance use counselor.

Recommended Length of Apprenticeship (Time-Based/Hybrid Programs Only)

The recommended length of time for on-the-job training in a Substance Use Counselor apprenticeship is 3,000 to 6,000 hours.

Work Process Schedule

Substance Use Counselor

ONET Code: 21-10111.00

RAPIDS Code: 2068

Program approach type (time-based, competency-based, hybrid):

Instructions for Use:

Competency-based programs: In the “performance level achieved” column, assess apprentices’ performance on each competency with the following scale. No monitoring of hours is required for this approach. See “Guidelines for Competency-Based, Hybrid and Time-Based Apprenticeship Training Approaches,” US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship, October 20, 2015, <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Cir2016-01.pdf>.

- 4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)
- 3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)
- 2—Completed the task with significant assistance
- 1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task
- 0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn’t covered, etc.)

Time-based programs: In the “hours” row, specify the number of hours apprentices will fulfill for each job function. No assessment of competencies is required for this approach.

Hybrid programs: In the “performance level achieved” column, assess apprentices’ performance on each competency using the 0–4 scale above. In the “hours” row, identify a range of hours apprentices should spend working on each major job function.

Job Function 1: Perform client intake		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Gather client’s substance use history	Core	
B. Identify withdrawal symptoms	Core	
C. Recognize signs of client overdose	Core	
D. Gather client’s medical history	Core	
E. Gather client’s mental health history	Core	
F. Identify potential co-occurring disorders	Core	
G. Evaluate client’s willingness for treatment and state of change	Core	
H. Gather information on client’s previous relapses (if relevant)	Core	
I. Gather information on client’s environmental stressors	Core	
J. Practice cultural sensitivity throughout interview process	Core	
K. Obtain records and releases from client’s other providers	Optional	
L. Document all intake and screening information	Core	

Job Function 2: Provide culturally sensitive, client-centered care		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Use trauma-informed practices with clients	Core	
B. Use evidence-based practices with clients	Core	
C. Engage with the criminal justice system on the client’s behalf, especially probation and parole officers	Core	
D. Provide culturally sensitive care to individuals exiting the criminal justice system	Core	

E. Provide culturally sensitive care to individuals experiencing homelessness	Core	
F. Provide culturally sensitive care to LGBTQIA individuals	Core	
G. Provide culturally sensitive care to individuals from racial and ethnic minority communities	Core	
H. Provide culturally sensitive care to clients with disabilities	Core	
I. Provide culturally sensitive care to clients of different religious backgrounds	Core	
J. Provide developmentally appropriate care to adolescent clients	Core	
K. Use appropriate resources to overcome any language barriers with clients	Core	

Job Function 3: Monitor treatment and recovery progress		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0-4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Communicate treatment plan to client and client's support system	Core	
B. Collaborate with other members of treatment team as needed	Core	
C. Coordinate continued drug and alcohol screenings	Optional	
D. Document treatment outcomes	Core	
E. Engage in harm reduction and HIV prevention	Core	
F. Assist with discharge planning	Core	

Job Function 4: Engage in crisis intervention		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Identify signs of crisis in client	Core	
B. Intervene in client crisis situations	Core	
C. Identify impacts of co-occurring disorders in crisis situations	Core	
D. Engage in relapse prevention	Core	
E. Assist client in responding to sobriety-threatening events	Core	

Job Function 5: Perform referrals		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Communicate available community resources to client	Core	
B. Make referrals to social services providers	Core	
C. Make referrals to other treatment providers for co-occurring disorders as appropriate	Core	
D. Make referrals to 12-step programs and other support groups	Core	
E. Make referrals to providers of medication for opioid use disorder as appropriate	Optional	
F. Follow up with client regarding all referrals	Core	
G. Engage in care coordination with other treatment providers	Core	
H. Document all referrals	Core	
I. Maintain relationships with community resources	Optional	
J. Make site visits to community resources	Optional	

Job Function 6: Maintain appropriate documentation		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Document all client interactions, including face-to-face, phone, and telehealth interactions	Core	
B. Document results of screenings and evaluations	Core	
C. Document changes to treatment plan with evidence of client agreement	Core	
D. Maintain files in written or electronic record systems within HIPAA and 42 CFR Part 2 requirements	Core	
E. Uphold all local, state, and federal privacy and confidentiality rules and regulations	Core	
F. Document date and length of time for all services provided to clients	Core	
G. Record client impressions of treatment	Core	
H. Document clinical supervision and case consultation	Core	

Job Function 7: Educate and engage client's support system		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Communicate treatment plan to client's support system	Core	
B. Communicate impacts of substance use disorders on support systems	Core	
C. Engage support system in treatment as appropriate	Optional	
D. Make referrals for members of client's support system as appropriate	Optional	
E. Maintain client privacy and confidentiality with support system	Core	
F. Engage client's support system in discharge planning	Core	

Job Function 8: Maintain professionalism		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	Core or optional	Performance level achieved (0–4) (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Maintain regular clinical and case supervision	Core	
B. Associate with a professional organization	Optional	
C. Participate in continuing education	Core	
D. Maintain awareness of state board requirements and regulations	Core	
E. Adhere to a code of ethics	Core	
F. Maintain appropriate boundaries with client	Core	
G. Engage in appropriate self-disclosure with client	Core	
H. Maintain appropriate relationships with client and client's support system	Core	
I. Maintain personal recovery and/or self-care	Core	

Related Technical Instruction

Substance Use Counselor

ONET Code: 21-1011.00

Program approach type (time-based, competency-based, hybrid):

RAPIDS Code: 2068

Instructions for Use:

Registered apprenticeships should include a recommended minimum of 144 hours of related technical instruction (RTI). Courses offered by accredited colleges and universities may be assigned a credit hour determination rather than a contact hour determination. In general, an academic credit unit is the equivalent of 15 clock hours of instruction.

Development and use of this RTI outline: Employers and academic institutions may approach RTI in markedly different ways. Our goal was not to identify the single best way to provide RTI or to identify a single provider whose content we deemed to be superior. Instead, our goal was to survey several education providers, including employers, institutions of higher education, high schools, private continuing education providers, labor organizations, professional associations, and, in some cases, municipalities that provide worker training, to identify topics or courses common among those providers that align with the job functions included in this work process schedule. Those common topics or courses are reflected in the RTI outline provided below, which may be useful in developing your RTI program or communicating your needs to an educational partner.

Licensure or certification requirements: Licensure and certification requirements differ by state. In some states, an individual who has completed 15 credits of related coursework may qualify to be licensed as an alcohol and drug trainee (for up to six years). Other than licensed trainees, most substance use counselors must hold a college degree (associate, bachelor's, master's, or doctoral). Examples of licenses at different degree levels include the following:

- Alcohol and drug trainees: requires 15 semester hours in alcohol and drug counseling plus ethics coursework
- Certified supervised counselor – alcohol and drug: requires an associate degree, including coursework in drug and alcohol counseling
- Certified associate counselor – alcohol and drug: requires a baccalaureate degree, including 20–40 semester hours of counseling-related coursework plus three years of supervised clinical experience

- Licensed graduate alcohol and drug counselor: individuals who have completed a master’s degree and are participating in supervised, postgraduate practice
- Licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor: requires a master’s or doctoral degree in a counseling-related or human services field and requires passing the Master Addiction Counselor exam, which is administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors

Degree requirements for licensure or certification, if applicable: See above.

Accreditation requirements of instructional provider for licensure or certification, if applicable: Certification and licensure are regulated by states, but in general, states require degrees to have been earned from an accredited college or university.

Anticipated changes in licensure or certification requirements, if known: None

Examples of state licensure or certification requirements:

Maryland

- Alcohol and drug trainees: requires 15 semester hours in alcohol and drug counseling plus ethics coursework
- Certified supervised counselor—alcohol and drug: requires an associate degree, including coursework in drug and alcohol counseling
- Certified associate counselor—alcohol and drug: requires a baccalaureate degree, including 20–40 semester hours of counseling-related coursework plus three years of supervised clinical experience
- Licensed graduate alcohol and drug counselor: individuals who have completed a master’s degree and are participating in supervised, postgraduate practice
- Licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor: requires a master’s or doctoral degree in a counseling-related or human services field and requires passing the Master Addiction Counselor exam, which is administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors

California

- Substance use disorder counselor: requires completion of a 9-hour orientation course before applying for licensure; within five years, the counselor must complete 315 hours of formal substance use disorder education, 255 hours of supervised substance use disorder training as a substance use disorder counselor, and 2,080 hours of substance use disorder-related work experience and pass the IC&RC exam.
- Counselors must register with a California Department of Health Care Services–approved certifying organization and have five years to become fully certified. Examples of approved certifying organizations include
 - the California Association for Drug/Alcohol Educators,
 - the California Association of DUI Treatment Programs, and
 - the California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals.

- Alcohol and drug trainees: requires 15 semester hours in alcohol and drug counseling plus ethics coursework
- Certified supervised counselor—alcohol and drug: requires an associate degree, including coursework in drug and alcohol counseling
- Certified associate counselor—alcohol and drug: requires a baccalaureate degree, including 20–40 semester hours of counseling-related coursework plus three years of supervised clinical experience
- Licensed graduate alcohol and drug counselor: individuals who have completed a master’s degree and are participating in supervised, postgraduate practice
- Licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor: requires a master’s or doctoral degree in a counseling-related or human services field and requires passing the Master Addiction Counselor exam, which is administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors

California

- Substance use disorder counselor: requires completion of a 9-hour orientation course before applying for licensure; within five years, the counselor must complete 315 hours of formal substance use disorder education, 255 hours of supervised substance use disorder training as a substance use disorder counselor, and 2,080 hours of substance use disorder–related work experience and pass the IC&RC exam.
- Counselors must register with a California Department of Health Care Services–approved certifying organization and have five years to become fully certified. Examples of approved certifying organizations include
 - the California Association for Drug/Alcohol Educators,
 - the California Association of DUI Treatment Programs, and
 - the California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals.

Examples of RTI providers for this occupation

Professional associations and labor organizations:

Employers: The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (samhsa.gov) provides resources and toolkits to help employers develop and implement alcohol- and drug-free workplace plans.

Military: The Navy provides training for substance abuse specialists at the Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor School.

States and municipalities: States may identify providers of required introduction-to-practice courses, ethics courses, and continuing education courses. These providers may include accredited institutions of higher education and professional education and continuing education providers.

Colleges and universities: Colleges and universities (including two-year, four-year, and graduate institutions) may offer certificate programs in substance abuse counseling and degree programs from the associate to doctoral degree levels. In some states, a degree in any human services field is sufficient to qualify an individual for licensure; however, states may require a certain number of credit hours in counseling as part of that degree to qualify.

No-cost online providers: Coursera provides numerous classes in psychology, human services, and counseling. Yale University recently launched a Coursera course called Addiction Treatment Clinical Skills for Healthcare Providers. Emory University provides a Coursera course called The Addicted Brain. edX provides a course called Managing Addiction: A Framework for Successful Treatment, which is offered by the University of Adelaide.

Prerequisite knowledge, skills or experience typically required by RTI providers for this occupation

Individuals interested in pursuing a career in substance abuse counseling must have strong interpersonal communication and good listening skills. In some cases, individuals entering this field as peer counselors must have personal experiences with drug or alcohol addiction but must be in recovery for a specified amount of time.

Certificate Program

Introduction to human services

Hours: 3 semester hours/45 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Explain the goals of human services programs and organizations and list the providers of these services in the local community.

- Describe federal and state human services resources, locate websites that help clients understand these resources, and explain how applications must be completed and processed for clients to receive services.
- Describe strategies for providing comprehensive and culturally sensitive human services.
- Demonstrate the ability to interview clients and identify human service needs and opportunities that would support them and their families.

Introduction to psychology

Hours: 3 semester hours/45 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Describe the history and origins of psychology.
- Describe key stages in human development and cognition.
- Describe the biology of psychology, including the central nervous system and brain function.
- Explain personality theory and, using case studies, identify how different types of personalities react to stressors, perceive the world around them, and engage in consciousness and self-visualization.
- Describe the types of physiological disorders often seen in human populations and the various treatment modalities used to help individuals cope with these disorders.
- Explain the purpose of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition, (DSM-IV) and demonstrate the ability to use the manual to understand the signs and symptoms of various mental health disorders or diagnoses.

Chemical dependency – fundamentals and pharmacology

Hours: 4 semester hours/60 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Explain the theories and etiology of addictions and addictive behaviors.
- Explain the neurobiology of chemical dependency and co-occurring disorders.
- Demonstrate the ability to assess an individual's propensity for substance use disorders and to identify the signs and symptoms of children and adolescents living in a home where substance use occurs.
- Explain the ethical and legal challenges, requirements, and limitations related to addictions and substance abuse counseling.
- Explain the importance of community and culture in preventing or assisting in recovery from substance use or abuse.

- Describe the classes of drugs most frequently used and abused, their chemical effects on the brain, and types of treatment therapies used to end dependency and support patients through detoxification.

Chemical dependency counseling skills

Hours: 4 semester hours/60 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Demonstrate the ability to interview children, adolescents, and adults to identify potential signs of substance use or chemical dependency.
- Explain the types of medical, psychological, and community counseling options available to assist individuals and families coping with substance use or abuse.
- Explain a patient's right to privacy and the ethical requirements of counseling professionals.
- Demonstrate the ability to properly document key findings from client interviews, including using electronic medical records and other computer-based patient care record systems.
- Explain the various ways individuals can manage the cost of receiving substance use or abuse counseling, including through the use of private health insurance programs, Medicaid, Medicare, Veterans Administration benefits, and public service organizations.

Working in the clinical environment

Hours: This differs by state and program. On average, the clinical component is around 30 to 60 hours.

Sample learning objectives

- Describe the role of each member in the substance use or abuse health care team and who has the authority to make decisions about a client's diagnosis and treatment plan.
- Explain the key responsibilities of a substance use or abuse counselor and the limits on the types of counseling services that can be provided based on various levels of education, licensure, or certification.
- Exhibit the ability to communicate clearly, listen actively, and extract key messages or themes from oral and written communication.
- Demonstrate the ability to prioritize among competing demands in the clinical setting.
- Demonstrate the ability to identify the warning signs of clients who may pose a threat to themselves or others, and describe strategies for managing and diffusing anger or tension in such situations.

Assessment and treatment planning

Hours: 3 semester hours/45 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Describe the key components of intake assessments and monitoring assessments for individuals who may have substance use or abuse concerns or may be seeking support to end substance use or abuse.
- Describe the types of cognitive or other tests that may be performed by psychologists, social workers, or neurologists to assess an individual's level of chemical dependency and general health status.
- Demonstrate the ability to contribute to the development of a treatment plan, to explain the purpose and intent of each element of sample treatment plans, and to monitor client progress in meeting the requirements of the treatment plan.
- Explain the types of health care providers who will provide each service, treatment, or procedure that is part of a treatment plan, and explain how the substance use counselor interacts with those providers, shares information, and seeks direction for executing a client's treatment plan.
- Demonstrate the ability to use various strategies to manage or diffuse emotions among coworkers, supervisors, clients, and health care teams that may intensify as a result of disagreements, anger, mistrust, mental illness, and fear.

Ethics in counseling

Hours: 1 semester hour/15 hours

Sample learning objectives

- Explain a patient's right to privacy and confidentiality, including in situations where the client is a minor.
- Describe the various laws that protect patient privacy and the consequences to clients and practitioners when confidentiality is breached.
- Describe the strategies for ensuring patient records are secure and private and describe the actions that one should take if a breach occurs.
- Describe the importance of informed consent and provide examples of situations where someone other than the client is legally permitted to receive information about and make decisions on behalf of a client seeking substance use or abuse counseling.
- Describe the strategies for maintaining professional relationships with peers and clients and their families.
- Provide written and oral descriptions of how a professional should ethically engage in various scenarios likely to occur within clinical treatment facilities, at outpatient service facilities, during group therapy or counseling sessions, or when individuals live in group housing.

Degree Programs

Associate and baccalaureate degree programs in human services and addiction counseling build upon the courses listed above for the certificate program, generally by adding coursework in mathematics, English composition, foreign language, statistics, history, sociology, and computer literacy.

Relevant military experience

The US military provides training for substance abuse caseworkers, substance abuse control specialists (Marine Corps), and drug and alcohol counselors (Navy). MOS codes that indicate a service member's role in this field include MOS 0149, 8538, and 9936.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has a large collection of resources to enable health care providers and counselors to provide culturally competent care to patients and to create culturally competent work and community environments. These resources can be found in Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [TIP 59: Improving Cultural Competence](#) (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015).

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has also produced a book that provides information about strategies and resources that help health care providers address diverse populations in intensive outpatient treatment programs; see Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, "[Chapter 10. Addressing Diverse Populations in Intensive Outpatient Treatment](#)," In *Substance Abuse: Clinical Issues in Intensive Outpatient Treatment*, Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series No. 47 (Rockville, MD, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006).

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STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

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