

## Poll Finds Maryland Voters Likely to Support Alcohol and Drug Treatment

The following poll was commissioned by Open Society Institute-Baltimore in May 2006 and was conducted by Steve Raabe, President of Opinion Works.

### **Overview**

Active voters across the State of Maryland strongly support increased access to alcohol and drug treatment for those who need it, whether through private insurance coverage or through public funding. A solid two-thirds of voters believe alcohol and drug treatment is effective, see treatment as a better policy option than prison, and support expanded access to treatment.

**Put into a political context as this election year unfolds, Maryland voters are strongly saying that they are more likely to vote for candidates who support increased access to treatment. *Six times* as many voters say they are *more likely* to vote for such a candidate compared to those who would be less likely. The net effect is a shift of one-third of voters toward candidates who support expanded alcohol and drug treatment.**

OpinionWorks interviewed a total of 1,214 likely Maryland general election voters by telephone March 31 – April 5, 2006. This survey has a maximum potential sampling error of  $\pm 2.8\%$  at a 95% confidence level. A more detailed methodology statement and background on OpinionWorks are found at the conclusion of this memorandum.

### **Context of the Problem**

One measure of the depth of the addiction problem in Maryland is the number of people who have known someone personally with an addiction to alcohol or drugs. The impact is widespread, as two-thirds of likely voters say they have known someone personally with such an addiction.

#### **Known Someone Personally with Addiction Problem**

	<b>Maryland Likely Voters</b>
Yes	67%
No	32%
Not sure/Refused to say	-%

*Note: Numbers may not always appear to add correctly due to rounding.*

“Have you known someone personally who has had a problem with alcohol or drug addiction?”

Lest one think this problem is isolated to only the state's urban areas or a certain group within the overall population, in fact this personal experience with addiction crosses all lines, regardless of gender, race, income, region, or political party:

	<b>Known Someone with Addiction Problem</b>
Men	69%
Women	65%
Whites	65%
African-Americans	73%
All Others	69%
Earn less than \$50,000 a year	61%
\$50,000 – \$74,999	72%
\$75,000 – \$99,999	74%
\$100,000 – \$149,999	73%
\$150,000 or more	73%
10 largest jurisdictions	67%
14 more rural counties	70%
Democrats	66%
Republicans	67%
Independents/Third Party	73%

Furthermore, there is a serious treatment gap in Maryland, as a large number of people appear not to have access to treatment when they need it. Among voters who have known someone with an addiction problem personally, 26% report that the person was not able to obtain the treatment they needed.

Removing voters from that pool who were not sure about the situation, as well as people who appeared to have effective private insurance coverage, it appears that as many as 39% were not able to access publicly-funded treatment when they needed it.

**Ability to Access the Needed Treatment**

	Known Someone with Addiction Problem	Aware of the Outcome*
Yes, able	34%	51%
<b>No, not able</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>39%</b>
Did not want treatment <i>(Volunteered response)</i>	6%	10%
Had insurance	10%	---
Not sure	23%	---
Refused to say	1%	---

*\*Those with effective private insurance coverage were removed from this pool.*

“If they did not have adequate insurance, were they able to get public treatment when they wanted it?”

**Effectiveness of Treatment**

In large numbers, voters view treatment as effective in helping someone overcome an addiction. Two-thirds of voters hold this view, but among those who have known someone personally who has dealt with an addiction problem, the number rises to nearly three-quarters (72%).

**Effectiveness of Alcohol and Drug Treatment**

	Maryland Likely Voters	Known Someone with Addiction Problem	Haven't Known Someone Personally
Effective	69%	<b>72%</b>	65%
Doesn't help	15%	<b>16%</b>	13%
Not sure	16%	<b>13%</b>	22%

“Do you think alcohol and drug treatment is effective in helping someone overcome an addiction, or doesn't it help?”

Consequently, a large number of voters – two-thirds of likely voters overall – see drug treatment as a more effective option than prison in stopping someone from using illegal drugs.

**Drug Treatment vs. Prison**

	Maryland Likely Voters
Treatment	67%
Prison	15%
Not sure/Depends	18%

“Do you think (rotate): [drug treatment or prison] is a better way to stop someone from using illegal drugs?”

### Policy Options

We examined three avenues for improving access to alcohol and drug treatment: coverage by private insurance companies, increased public funding in general, and public funding through an increased tax on alcohol. Each of these ideas garnered support from roughly two-thirds of Maryland voters:

#### Support for Policy Options

	Private Insurance Cover Treatment	Increase Public Funds for Treatment	Increase Alcohol Tax for Treatment
Yes/Favor	67%	63%	67%
No/Oppose	23%	28%	29%
Not sure	10%	8%	4%

“Do you think private insurance companies should cover alcohol and drug treatment, or not?”

“Would you favor or oppose increasing public funding for alcohol and drug addiction treatment?”

“Would you favor or oppose an increased tax on alcohol to improve access to alcohol and drug treatment?”

All three of these policy options receive support across party lines. Looking at a proposed alcohol tax in particular, Republicans approve of it by a 17-point margin, while Independents are almost two-to-one in favor, and Democrats more than three-to-one:

#### Support for Alcohol Tax by Party

	Democrats	Republicans	Independents/ Third Party
Favor	73%	57%	62%
Oppose	22%	40%	32%
Not sure	4%	3%	6%

It is worth noting that a majority of voters (56%) who intend to support Gov. Ehrlich this November against either Martin O'Malley or Doug Duncan also support an alcohol tax to fund improved access to treatment.

**The alcohol tax funding option is strongly supported among voters who remain undecided in either gubernatorial contest, as well.** Sixty-nine percent of undecided voters in the Ehrlich/O'Malley race and 68% in the Ehrlich/Duncan contest support an alcohol tax increase to fund treatment.

### **Improved Access to Treatment as a Voter Cue**

Support for improved access to alcohol and drug treatment is strong enough among voters in Maryland that it proves to be a potentially powerful voter cue. Forty-one percent of likely voters say they would be more likely to vote for a legislative candidate who supports increased availability of treatment, compared to only 7% who would be less likely to do so.

**In fact, one in six voters (17%) say they would be much more likely to vote for a candidate who supports increased access to treatment – a potentially powerful voter swing.**

#### **Voter Impact on State Legislative Candidate Who Supports Increased Availability of Treatment**

	<b>Maryland Likely Voters</b>
<b>More Likely to Support Candidate</b>	<b>41%</b>
<i>Much More Likely</i>	<i>17%</i>
<i>A Little More Likely</i>	<i>24%</i>
Less Likely	7%
No Difference	44%
Not Sure/Refused to Say	7%

“Would knowing that a candidate for the state legislature supports increased availability to alcohol and drug addiction treatment make you (rotate): [more likely (to vote for that person), less likely], or wouldn’t it make a difference in how you would vote? (If more likely): Would you say much more likely or only a little more likely?”

### **How This Survey Was Conducted**

OpinionWorks interviewed 1,214 likely Maryland voters by telephone March 31 – April 5, 2006. This likely voter sample carries a maximum potential margin of sampling error of  $\pm 2.8\%$  at a 95% confidence level. That is to say, 95% of the time the survey results would differ from the actual views of likely voters statewide by no more than 2.8% if every likely voter in Maryland had been interviewed.

Interviewees were drawn from the most current file of registered voters available, provided by the local boards of elections across the state and matched with telephone numbers by a commercial vendor. Voters were selected randomly to be interviewed if they had voted in either of the last two general elections, or had registered to vote since then. Voters were further screened to ensure they intend to vote this November. Weights were applied to bring the voter sample into strict compliance with the expected 2006 turnout patterns within seven regions of the state based on gender, partisanship, and race or ethnicity.

**Brief Background on OpinionWorks**

OpinionWorks' principal, Steve Raabe, has been writing and conducting surveys of Maryland voters dating back to 1992 on numerous issues. From 2001 to 2005 he was the methodologist and primary author of the polling program of *The (Baltimore) Sun*; the identical methodology has been applied to this voter survey. OpinionWorks' current clients include the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce, the Museum Association of New York, The Wilderness Society, Colgate University, the New York State Historical Association, Oxford University, the Maryland Citizens' Health Initiative, and the American Society of Interior Designers.