



# 7 in 10 Kentucky adults believe addiction is a disease, varies by region

In the 1930s when scientists began to study addiction, drug users were described as “morally flawed and lacking willpower.”<sup>1</sup> In recent years, studies of the human brain have radically changed our understanding of compulsive drug use. We now know that drug use changes the way the brain functions and that these changes can be long-lasting and can lead to harmful behaviors in people who use drugs.

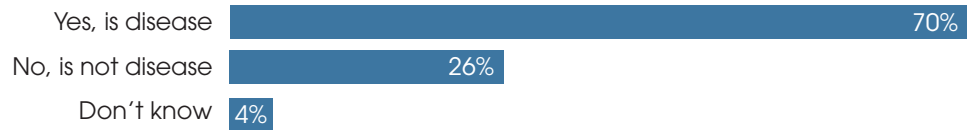
The National Institute on Drug Abuse describes addiction as a “chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences” that can be affected by the biology, environment and development of an individual.<sup>2</sup> A thorough understanding of addiction shapes how effective treatments are offered and supported in Kentucky, including treatment that focuses on integrating physical, mental and substance use services, and how access to treatment is maintained through Medicaid expansion.

In 2016, Kentucky had the fifth-highest rate of overdose deaths

<sup>1</sup> Volkow, N. (2014). *Drugs, brains, and behavior: The science of addiction*. Retrieved April 6, 2018, from [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/preface](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/preface).

<sup>2</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse. (2018). *Understanding drug use and addiction*. Retrieved on April 2, 2018, from [www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction](http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction).

### Do you believe addiction is – or is not – a disease?



SOURCE: 2017 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (released April 2018)



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in the nation.<sup>3</sup> This indicates that addiction affects a large number of people in the Commonwealth.<sup>4</sup>

The 2017 **Kentucky Health Issues Poll (KHIP)** asked two questions to understand Kentucky adults’ perceptions of addiction. KHIP is sponsored by Interact for Health and the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky.

### EASTERN KENTUCKY ADULTS LESS LIKELY TO BELIEVE ADDICTION IS A DISEASE

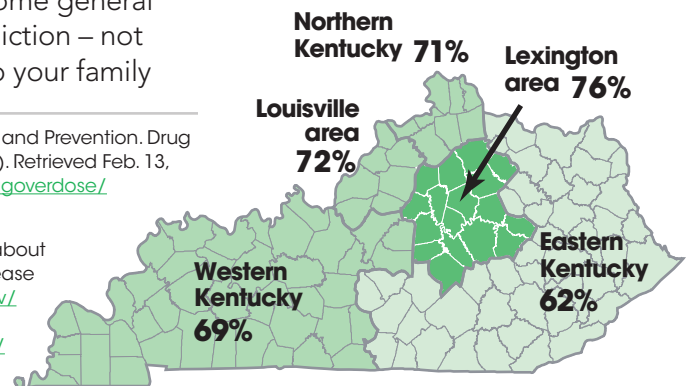
The question posed by KHIP was, “I’d like to ask you some general questions about addiction – not related specifically to your family

members or friends, but just your more general observations. Do you believe that addiction is – or is not – a disease?”

Seven in 10 Kentucky adults believe that addiction is a disease (70%). That compares with fewer than 3 in 10 who believe it is not a disease (26%) and 4% who said they did not know.

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### Percentage of Kentucky adults who believe that addiction is a disease, by region



SOURCE: 2017 Kentucky Health Issues Poll (released April 2018)

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Drug Overdose Death Data. (2017). Retrieved Feb. 13, 2018, from [www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html](http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths.html).

<sup>4</sup> For additional information about prevalence and patterns, please see <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUHsaeSpecificStates2016A/NSDUHsaeSpecificStates2016.htm>.

These findings, unless otherwise noted, are from the Kentucky Health Issues Poll, funded by the Foundation for a Healthy Kentucky and Interact for Health. The Kentucky Health Issues Poll was conducted Oct. 24-Dec. 2, 2017, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 1,692 adults from throughout Kentucky was interviewed by telephone. This included 861 landline interviews and 831 cell phone interviews with cell phone users. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to ±2.4%. There are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as nonresponse, question wording, or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the Kentucky Health Issues Poll, please visit [www.healthy-ky.org](http://www.healthy-ky.org) or [www.interactforhealth.org/kentucky-health-issues-poll](http://www.interactforhealth.org/kentucky-health-issues-poll).

Having a family member or friend who has experienced problems as a result of heroin use, methamphetamine use or prescription drug abuse did not affect perceptions of addiction as a disease.

Responses varied by location. Adults living in Eastern Kentucky (62%) were less likely than adults living in other regions to believe that addiction is a disease. (See map on first page.)

### **8 IN 10 ADULTS WHO BELIEVE ADDICTION IS A DISEASE SAY IT'S BOTH PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL**

KHIP asked those adults who believe addiction is a disease, "Do you believe that addiction is a physical disease, a psychological disease, or both a physical and psychological disease?"

Among Kentucky adults who believe addiction is a disease, 8 in 10 feel it is both a physical and psychological disease (81%). Fewer than 2 in 10 adults believe it is a psychological disease only (17%), and only 1% believe it is a physical disease only.