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**POLL FINDS ALCOHOL AND DRUG ADDICTION HAS IMPACTED
THE LIVES OF 63 PERCENT OF AMERICANS**

*Strong public support for action to address discrimination
against people in recovery from addiction*

(Washington, D.C., May 14, 2004)— People in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs face widespread stigma and discrimination, according to a groundbreaking, national survey released today. Overwhelming majorities say that discrimination against people in recovery is a problem in the United States today and that policies and attitudes need to be changed.

A majority of those surveyed (63 percent) said there had been a great deal or some impact on their own lives as a result of grappling with addiction, and for most of them (72 percent of those who have been impacted) the addiction was among a family member. “Breaking the cycle of addiction is critical to a healthy society,” said Patricia Taylor, campaign coordinator for Faces & Voices of Recovery.

Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Robert M. Teeter’s Coldwater Corporation conducted the poll from April 19-22, 2004. The poll surveyed a nationally representative sample of 801 American adults. This is a first-ever comprehensive survey of the general public on stigma, discrimination and other barriers to recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Faces & Voices of Recovery, a Washington, DC-based national recovery advocacy campaign, commissioned the poll.

Two thirds of the public believes that a stigma exists toward people in recovery from addiction to alcohol or other drugs after stigma is defined as “something that detracts from the character or reputation of a person, a mark of disgrace.” A significant minority (27 percent) admits they would be less likely to hire someone who was in long-term recovery from addiction, and strong majorities say that discrimination in the workplace (80 percent) and the availability of health insurance for people seeking recovery (75 percent) is a problem in the United States today.

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“This poll strongly illustrates the barriers and roadblocks that people face as they strive to improve their lives and participate in community life,” said Taylor. “Discrimination is very much a factor in the lives of millions of Americans who are in recovery—those who have been addicted to alcohol or other drugs but are now free of their addiction.”

Public Calls for Changes in Policies and Attitudes

The public shows a strong preference for policies that treat addiction as a health rather than a law enforcement issue. For example, more than eight out of ten people (81 percent—including 85 percent of Democrats and 80 percent of Republicans) say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate for Congress who favored reallocating what the government spends on the war on drugs to place more emphasis on drug prevention, education, treatment and recovery programs. The same proportion would be more likely to vote for a candidate who expanded programs to get treatment for drug users rather than locking them up.

“This poll signals a sea change in the way America believes policymakers should be addressing addiction issues,” said lead researcher, Allan Rivlin, a senior vice president with Peter D. Hart Research Associates. “The survey reveals a public that is willing to look at recovery from addiction in new ways. Much like the change in attitudes in the 1980s towards people living with AIDS, the public is ready to stop blaming the victim and start treating the disease of addiction.”

Specifically, findings include:

- A 76 percent majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who proposed a law that required health insurance companies to cover recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs the same as other medical conditions. Support is bi-partisan including 66 percent of Republicans and 87 percent of Democrats.
- A 75 percent majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who called for an increase in federal government funding for programs to prevent and treat addiction and support recovery, as well as fund scientific research on the causes of addiction.
- By 63 percent to 28 percent, the public supports changing the law that bans students who have been arrested for drug possession from receiving student loans and other forms of financial aid in the Higher Education Act.

“Rather than seeing a deterrent against drug possession, the vast majority views this policy as a deterrent against people who are now making the decision to try to turn their life around,” said Rivlin.

Changes Proposed to Address Stigma and Discrimination

Faces & Voices of Recovery’s “Right to Addiction Recovery Platform” outlines an agenda to reduce stigma and discrimination against those in recovery. Recommended actions include:

- Repealing the ban on federal financial aid to students with drug convictions under the Higher Education Act;
- Encouraging the Surgeon General to commission a report on addiction recovery;
- Improving Medicare and Medicaid to include addiction and recovery services;

- Honoring claims by insurers for the care of any injury sustained by an insured person while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs; and
- Ensuring that employees who seek treatment not be subject to discriminatory actions or termination and that past alcohol or drug use be considered only when relevant to the job.

“We know that millions of Americans are in long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs,” said Taylor. “We know that recovery is an achievable goal; that people in recovery are leading productive lives. It is now time for this to be affirmed in all areas of society—from the job market to our health care system to our legal system. Our nation’s policies and programs should support—not set up roadblocks for—the 23 million Americans who still need help.”

Today’s poll was conducted using random digit dialing (RDD) techniques where individuals are selected using a probability sample design that gives all telephone numbers in the United States (both listed and unlisted) an equal chance to be included. The statistical margin of sampling error for the survey as a whole is +/- 3.46 percent. The margin of sampling error for smaller sub-groups will be larger than that and sampling error is not the only source of error or bias that could affect survey results.

Peter D. Hart Research Associates and Robert M. Teeter Coldwater Corporation is the bi-partisan effort of the polling organizations of veteran pollsters Peter D. Hart (D) and Robert Teeter (R), who have collaborated on numerous other projects, including the respected *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News polls.

Faces & Voices of Recovery is working to mobilize, organize and rally the families, friends and allies of the millions of Americans in recovery from addiction in a campaign to: end discrimination; broaden social understanding; and achieve a just response to addiction as a public health crisis. For more information, please visit: www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org.

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