

# Adult Attention Deficit Disorder in the Black Community

William Lawson, MD, PhD

June 10, 2021



Central East (HHS Region 3)

**MHTTC**

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# MHTTC Network

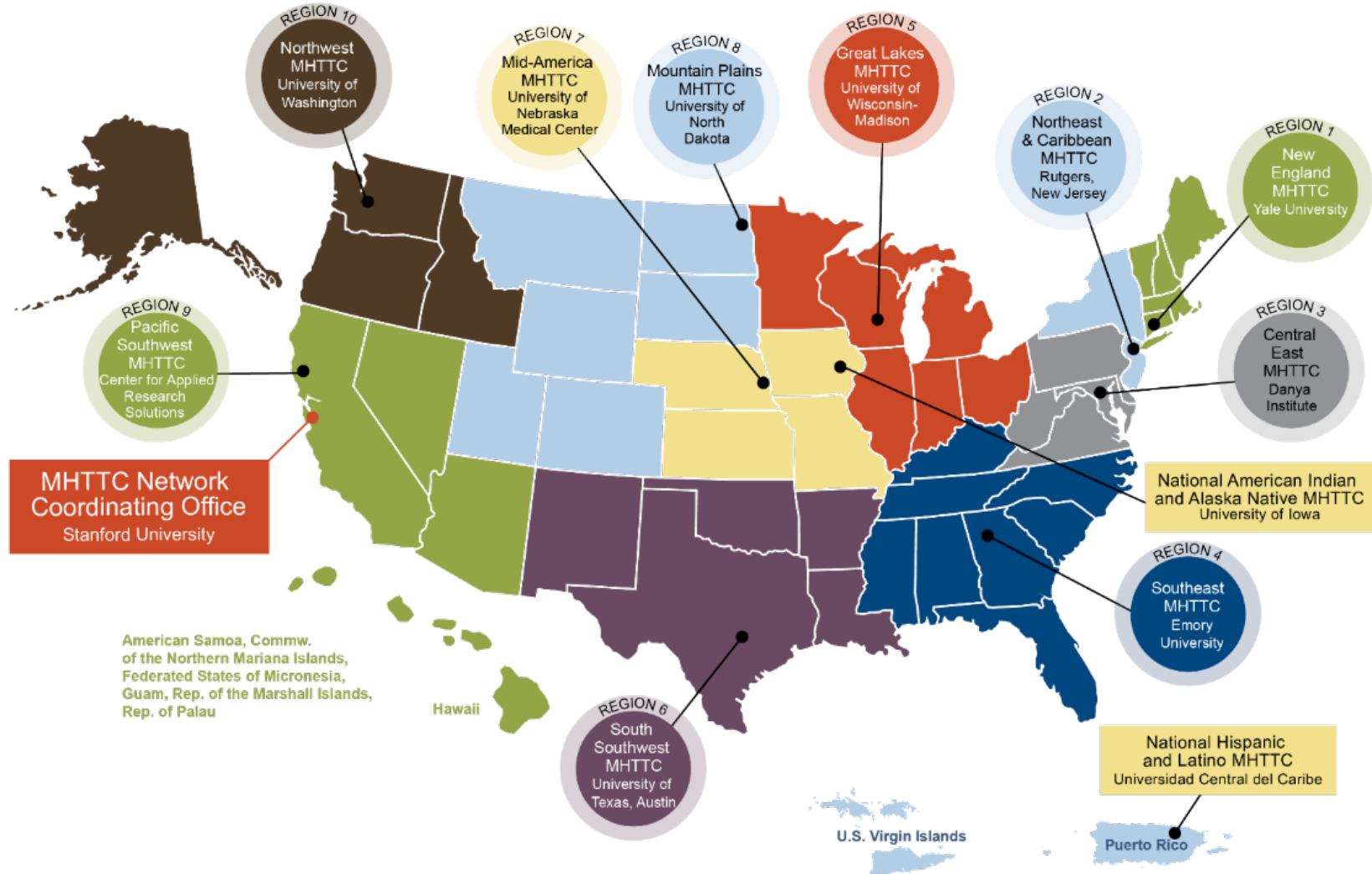


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# MHTTC Purpose

The MHTTC Network vision is to unify science, education and service to transform lives through evidence-based and promising treatment and recovery practices in a recovery-oriented system of care.

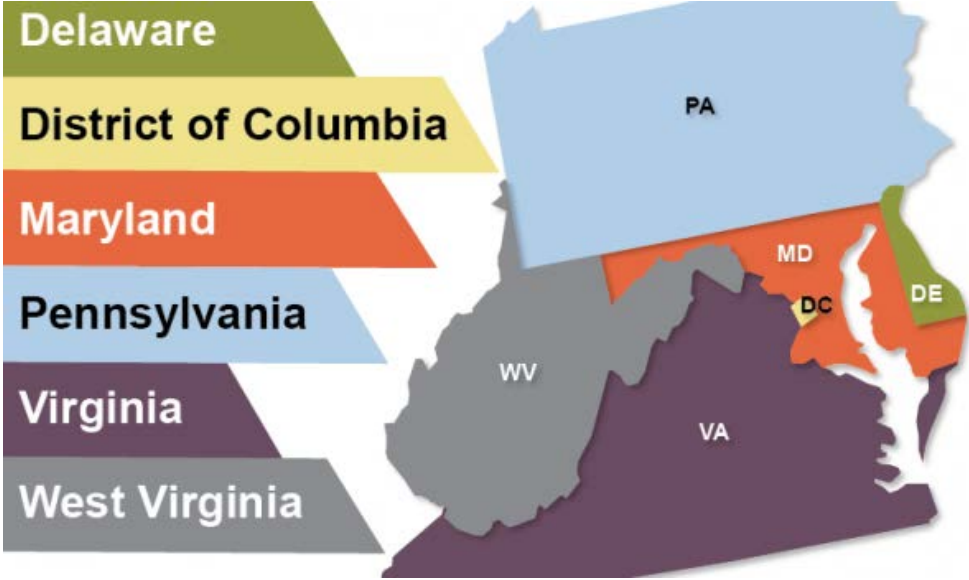


# Central East MHTTC Goals

## Funded by SAMHSA to:

- **Accelerate** the adoption and implementation of mental health related evidence-based practices
- **Heighten** the awareness, knowledge, and skills of the behavioral health workforce
- **Foster** alliances among culturally diverse practitioners, researchers, policy makers, family members, and consumers
- **Ensure** the availability and delivery of publicly available, free of charge, training and technical assistance

# Central East Region 3



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At the time of this presentation, Tom Coderre served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use at SAMHSA. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the speakers, and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.

# Evaluation Information

As part of receiving funding through SAMHSA to provide this training, the Central East MHTTC is required to submit data related to the quality of this event. At the end of today's presentation, please take a moment to complete a brief survey about today's training.

# ***Adult Attention Deficit Disorder in the Black Community***

***William Lawson, MD, PhD***  
***Treasurer, Black Psychiatrists of America***

**Health Equity Webinar Series**

**A collaboration of the CE-MHTTC and the Black Psychiatrists of America**

**June 10, 2021**

**Moderator:**

**Annelle B. Primm, MD, MPH**

**Black Psychiatrists of America, Council of Elders**



# COVID-19: Unprecedented Disaster

- Catastrophic impact on Black and other marginalized communities with disparate levels of illness, death, and economic fallout superimposed on layers of pre-existing inequities
- Symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Potential exacerbation of underlying mental disorders such as Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

# Today's Program

- Special thanks to the CE-MHTTC for its support of this eleventh session of the Black Psychiatrists of America Health Equity Webinar Series
- Today's program features William Lawson, MD, PhD, Treasurer of the Black Psychiatrists of America

# Adult Attention Deficit Disorder in the Black Community

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# Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a disorder marked by an ongoing pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning.
- Adult attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a mental health condition that can lead to unstable relationships, poor work performance, and low self-esteem, trouble focusing, hyperactivity, and impulsive behavior.

# 3 Core Symptoms of ADHD

**Impulsivity**

**Hyperactivity**

**Inattention**

# The Signs and Symptoms

- **Inattention** wanders off task, lacks persistence, has difficulty sustaining focus, and is disorganized
- **Hyperactivity**
- Move about constantly, including in situations in which it is not appropriate; or excessively fidgets, taps, or talks. In adults, extreme restlessness or wearing others out with constant activity.
- **Impulsivity**
  - Hasty actions that occur in the moment without first thinking about them and that may have a high potential for harm, or a desire for immediate rewards or inability to delay gratification.
  - Socially intrusive and excessively interrupt others or make important decisions without considering the long-term consequences.



# HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOU HAVE IT

- Signs and symptoms of ADHD in adults can be hard to spot. However, core symptoms can start early in life and continue into adulthood, creating major problem and for adults present for at least 6 months
- No single test can confirm the diagnosis. Making the diagnosis will likely include:
  - Physical exam, to help rule out other possible causes.
  - Mental Status Exam to differentiate from other mental problems and identify comorbidities
  - Information gathering, such as asking about any current medical issues, personal and family medical history, and the history of current symptoms
  - ADHD rating scales or psychological tests to screen for symptoms and collect and evaluate information.

# The experience

- In adults, the main features of ADHD may include difficulty paying attention, impulsiveness and restlessness. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. Many adults with ADHD aren't aware they have it — they just know that everyday tasks can be a challenge.



# SOCIAL SITUATIONS

- Difficulty waiting for his or her turn
- Frequently interrupts or intrudes on others
- Talks excessively

# WORK/SCHOOL

- Trouble getting organized (Examples: difficulty keeping materials in order, poor time management skills, tends to miss deadlines, missed appointments)
- Trouble sitting still
- Fails to pay close attention to details or makes careless mistakes
- Relevant because African Americans are more likely at school to receive corporal punishment, face suspension, or dropout
- At work to be terminated, to be underpaid, to not be promoted

# HOME

- Forgetful in daily activities, such as running errands, returning calls, and keeping appointments
- Loses things like homework, keys, eyeglasses, wallets, and mobile phones
- Difficulty doing leisure activities quietly
- Have marital conflict or contribute to spousal abuse

# Diagnosis and misdiagnosis

- Some medical conditions or treatments may cause signs and symptoms similar to those of ADHD.
- Examples include:
  - Mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, conduct disorders, learning and language deficits, or other psychiatric disorders
  - Medical problems that can affect thinking or behavior, such as a developmental disorder, seizure disorder, thyroid problems, sleep disorders, brain injury or low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
  - Drugs and medications, such as alcohol or other substance misuse and certain medications
  - Self medication is common but ironically more likely with nonstimulant drugs of abuse or recreation.

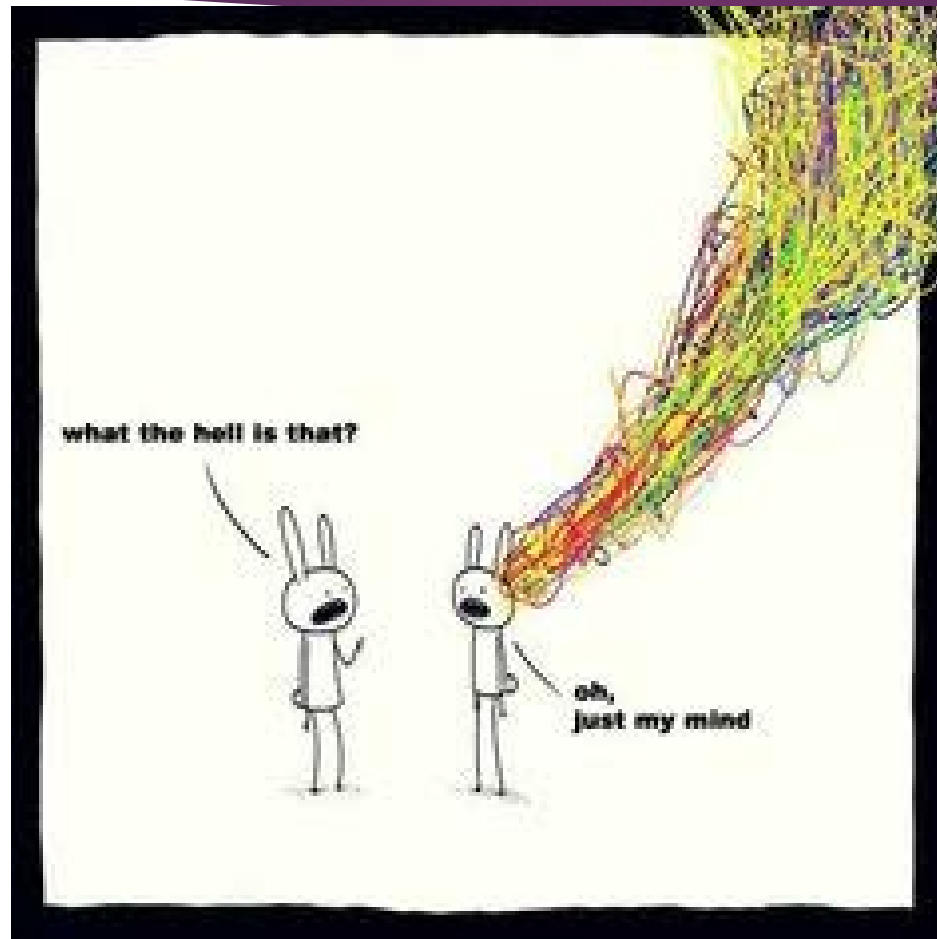
# Cases

- A lawyer constantly got passed over for promotion. Subpar reports and problems with timelessness frequently got him in difficulty. He thought the firm was racist. His son was diagnosed with ADHD and his grades improved with his medication. The father sought treatment and his performance took off.
- A graduate student continued to fail her comprehensives despite making solid A's in undergraduate school. She thought the HBCU had inferior teachers. A clinical supervisor had her take an ADD screening test. With treatment she got her dissertation done on time.
- A dental student was facing expulsion because of his constant irritability and poor performance on his practicum. He was referred to a psychiatrist. After several weeks of treatment he jumped to the front of the class and his social life took off.

# In ADHD:

- It is normal to have some inattention, unfocused motor activity, and impulsivity,
- with ADHD, these behaviors:
  - are more severe
  - occur more often
  - interfere with or reduce the quality of how they function socially, or in a job

Not a new abnormality just more of it!





# Psychosocial Implications

- 75 percent of adults who have ADHD do not know that they have it.
- Adults who have ADHD but do not know it are at much higher risk than the general population for serious problems.
- Mood disorders, extreme sadness, and anxiety often occur when ADHD goes undiagnosed. Even if these conditions are treated, the underlying problem, if left untreated, leads to other problems.
- Adults with undiagnosed ADHD get fired from their jobs more frequently, or they impulsively quit, or they underachieve, slowly losing self-esteem, confidence, drive, and joy in life. They often resign themselves to a life with less success than it could have were they diagnosed and treated.





## Risk Factors

Researchers are not sure what causes ADHD. Like many other illnesses, several factors can contribute to ADHD, such as:

- Cigarette smoking, alcohol use, or drug use during pregnancy
- Exposure to environmental toxins — such as lead, found mainly in paint and pipes in older buildings
- Exposure to environmental toxins during pregnancy
- Exposure to environmental toxins, such as high levels of lead, at a young age
- Low birth weight
- Brain injuries

Note that many of these risks are greater in people of color

# ADHD and Comorbid conditions

## Percent

80

25

20

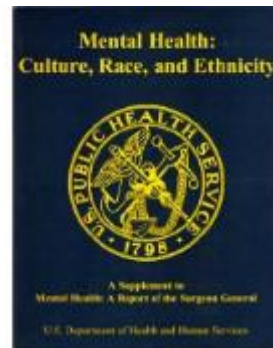
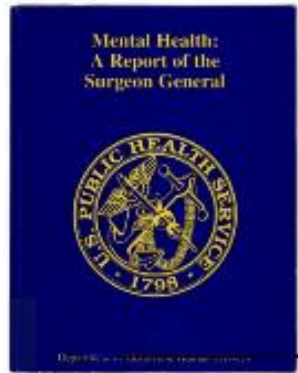
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## Conditions

- Adults with ADHD and another psychiatric disorder
- Anxiety disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Substance abuse disorder

# Disparities

## Landmark Reports



**Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General (1999)**

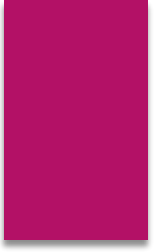
**First Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health**



**Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity**  
**A supplement released in 2001**

# REPORTS

- SUPPLEMENTAL SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH OF MINORITIES 2001
- NO SUBSTANTIAL DIFFERENCE IN PREVALENCE *INCLUDING ADHD*
- SIGNIFICANT ILLNESS BURDEN
- LACK OF ACCESS TO TREATMENT



ADHD is more common in males than females, and females with ADHD are more likely to have problems primarily with inattention. As a result, ADHD is often overlooked in females especially adults. Other conditions, such as learning disabilities, anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, depression, and substance abuse, are common in people with ADHD.

# Diagnosing

## MISDIAGNOSIS OR UNDERDIAGNOSIS?

- DEPRESSION THOUGHT TO BE RARE AMONG ETHNIC MINORITIES
- BIPOLAR DISORDER THOUGHT TO BE UNKNOWN
- SCHIZOPHRENIA BELIEVED TO BE FAR MORE COMMON
- ANXIETY DISORDERS SELDOM DIAGNOSED



# CONTRARY TO THE BELIEF ON THE STREET

- Many believe people of color are overdiagnosed with ADHD
- But UNDERDIAGNOSIS IS COMMON
- MISDIAGNOSIS IS VERY COMMON
- LACK OF ACCESS TO TREATMENT IS EVEN MORE COMMON

# Some racial disparities

## PUBLIC HEALTH DISPARITIES

- Unintentional injuries, mainly motor vehicle crashes, were the fifth leading cause of death for the total population, but they were the leading cause of death for minorities aged 1 to 44 years.
- The death rate for HIV/AIDS was 4.5 for the total population but 39.9 for African American men aged 25 to 44 years.
- Homicide remains the number one cause of death for young African American males
- Substance abuse and mental disorders associated with increase risk for all the above



# Contributor to the substance abuse epidemic?

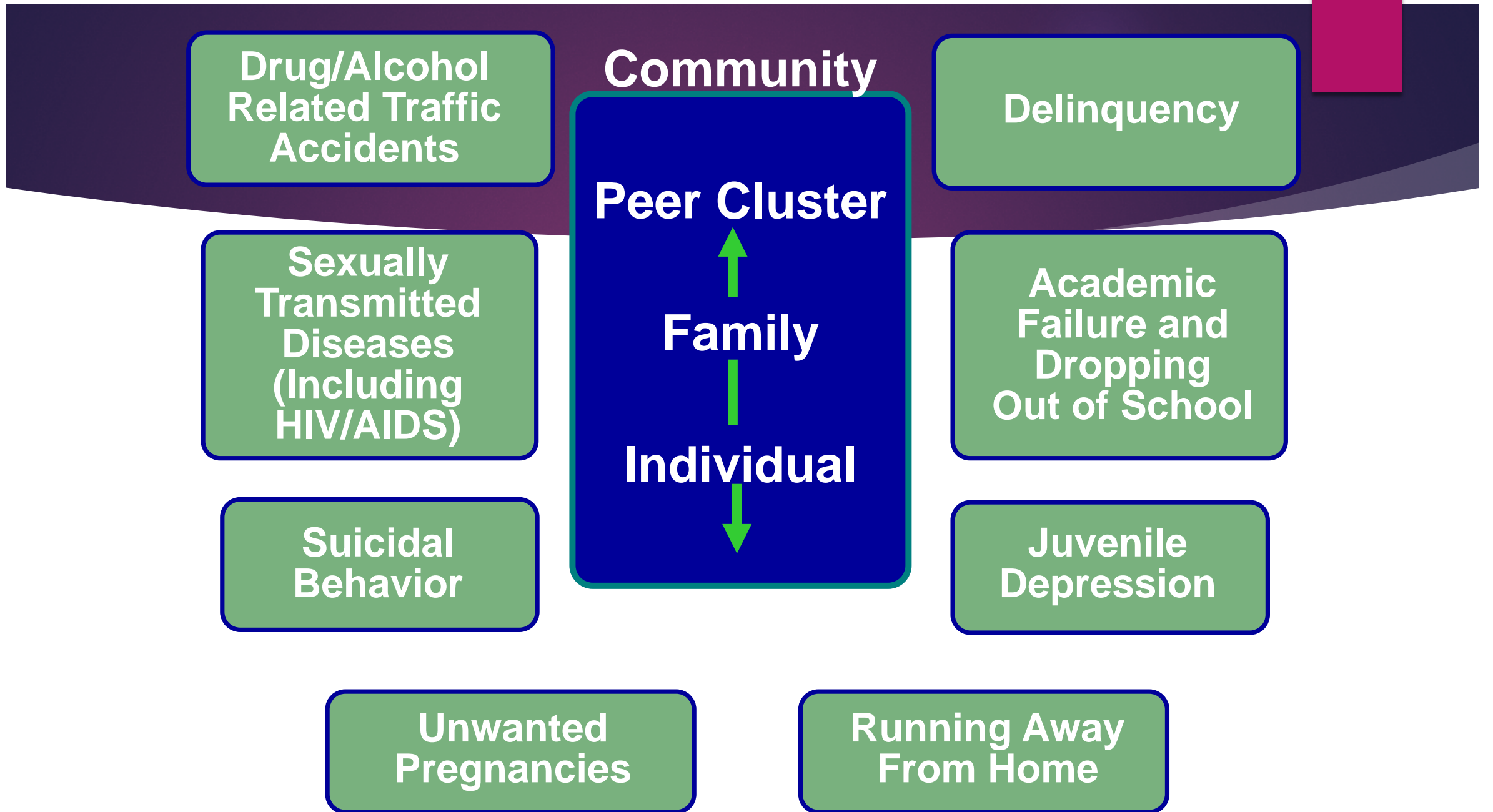
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## Pain Relief and Euphoria



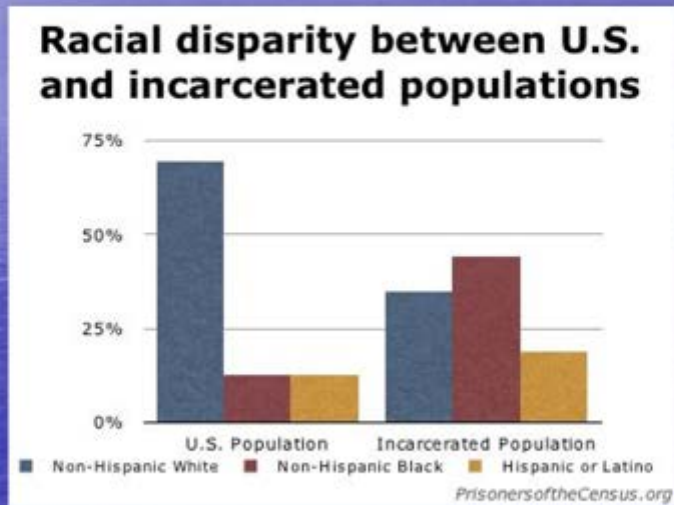
# Consequences

- Substance abuse afflicts a far higher percentage of adults with undiagnosed ADHD than adults in the general population. These problems typically lead to more problems, from DUIs to the end of a marriage, to crime and, in some cases, jail.
- Accidents of all kinds are more common, especially car accidents and speeding, which carry with them the risk of permanent physical disability or death, and trouble with the law.



# Risk of Incarceration

Out of proportion



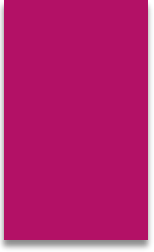
# Best treatment

- Standard treatments for ADHD in adults typically involve medication, education, skills training and psychological counseling. A combination of these is often the most effective treatment.

# Medication

- Stimulants, such as products that include methylphenidate or amphetamine, are typically the most commonly prescribed medications for ADHD, but other medications may be prescribed. Stimulants appear to boost and balance levels of brain chemicals called neurotransmitters.
- Other medications used to treat ADHD include the nonstimulant atomoxetine and certain antidepressants such as bupropion.





The site of action of methylphenidate (a stimulant used to treat ADHD/HKD) suggests that dopamine is the principal neurotransmitter involved, although norepinephrine has also been implicated. Recent molecular genetic studies have documented significant association of a refined phenotype of ADHD/HKD with polymorphisms in dopamine genes, which may alter the functions of the implicated neural networks. Recent investigations of brain development and brain injury also suggest that damage to these specific neural networks may produce symptoms of ADHD/HKD.

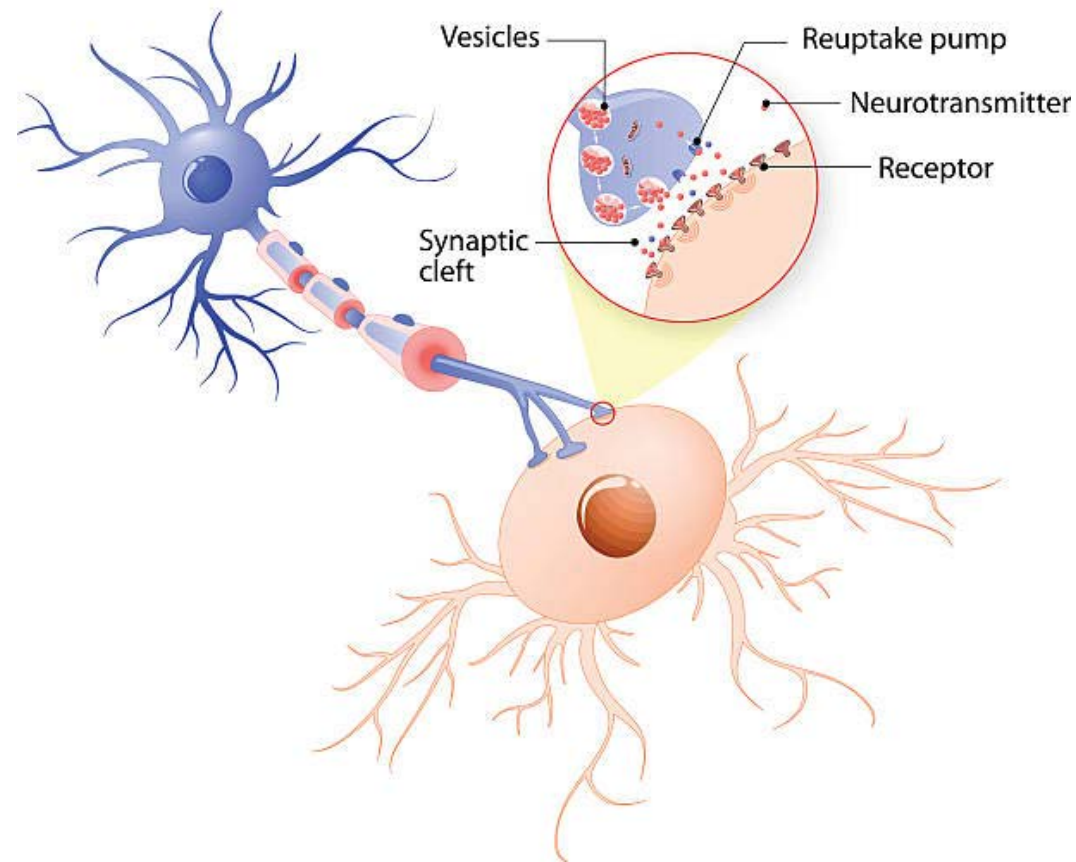
Where the action is





# Where it is happening

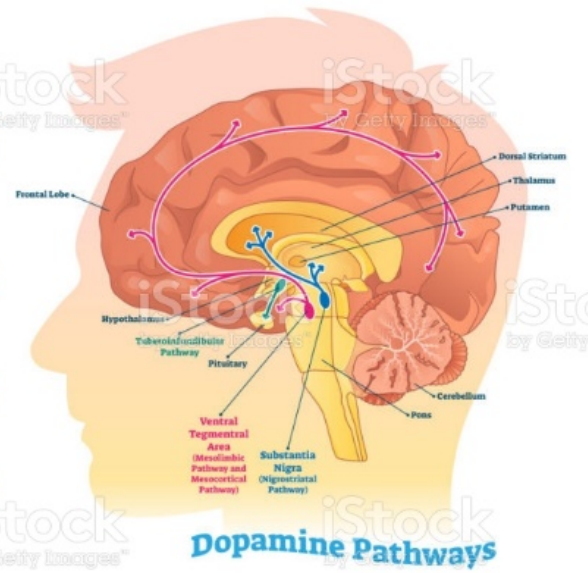
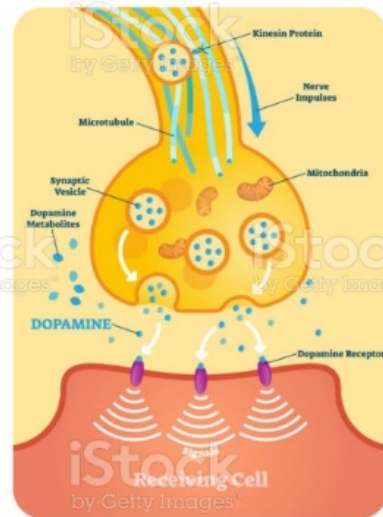
## CHEMICAL SYNAPSE



# Where the action is



**DOPAMINERGIC NEURONS**  
Dopamine Producing Nerve Cells



# Genes and Environment

## HUMAN GENOME PROJECT

- ▣ TEASE OUT THE HUMAN GENOME
- ▣ IDENTIFY ALL GENES
- ▣ DETERMINE THEIR FUNCTION



# NONMEDICAL APPROACHES

For Adults:

A professional counselor or therapist can help an adult with ADHD learn how to organize his or her life with tools such as:

- Keeping routines
- Making lists for different tasks and activities
- Using a calendar for scheduling events
- Using reminder notes
- Assigning a special place for keys, bills, and paperwork
- Breaking down large tasks into more manageable, smaller steps so that completing each part of the task provides a sense of accomplishment



# Barriers

## Limited Therapeutic Options

- ▶ Lack of access to culturally competent therapists
- ▶ Lack of access to evidence based therapy
- ▶ Lack of contact with mental health and substance abuse provider specialists

# Nonpharmacological approaches

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy.** This structured type of counseling teaches specific skills to manage your behavior and change negative thinking patterns into positive ones. It can help you deal with life challenges, such as school, work or relationship problems, and help address other mental health conditions, such as depression or substance misuse.
- **Marital counseling and family therapy.** This type of therapy can help loved ones cope with the stress of living with someone who has ADHD and learn what they can do to help. Such counseling can improve communication and problem-solving skills.



# Barriers

- Provider:

- Not present in adults
- Lack of information
- Stereotypes
- It's a conduct problem
- It's brain damage

- Patient:

- Stigma
- Misinformation
- Personal esteem
- Better to be Bad than Mad
- Self treatment

# CONSPIRACY BELIEFS AND MISINFORMATION



# MTYTHS ABOUT

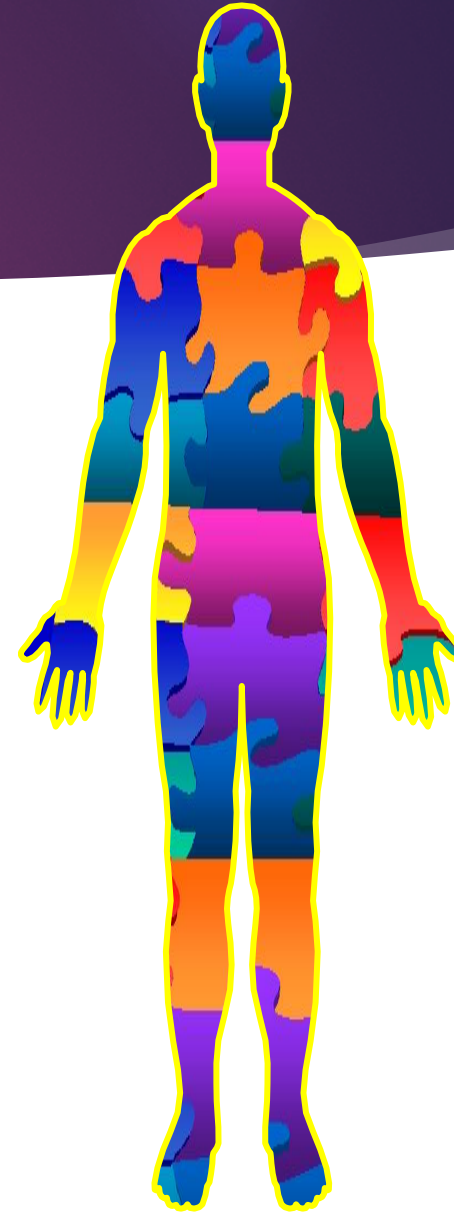
- *INSIDIOUS PLOT TO MAKE Black men less aggressive*
- *Way for drug companies to make money by exploitation*
- *Cause brain damage*
- *Nutrition alone is the best treatment*
- *It creates addicts*
- There are more direct ways to accomplish this
- Perhaps through opiates not stimulants
- Multiple imaging studies show otherwise
- Poor nutrition can certainly make things worse but targeted approaches have been mixed at best
- It may reduce the risk of drug abuse in those with ADHD

# The Good News

- Medications used to treat ADHD are among the most reliably effective psychopharmacotherapy
- Medical and nonmedical approaches are all highly effective

# Treat the Whole Person!

- No single treatment is appropriate for all individuals
- Every effort should be to make available the best evidence-based treatment
- Treatment must attend to the multiple needs of the individual
- Treatment should be readily available no matter race, gender, orientation, or socio-economic status
- Education, education, education for community leaders, providers, patients



# Questions







# Contact Us



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