



Kansas | Healthy Blue | Medicaid

Substance abuse with SBIRT in action: improving patient lives



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Focusing on high-risk behavior

Because of the role alcohol and drug misuse plays in contributing to illness, injury, and even death, it is crucial to have protocols to take advantage of a *teachable moment* by implementing screening and brief intervention as part of routine care.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health estimates in 2022, 70.3 million people aged 12 or older (or 17.3%) had a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year, including 29.5 million who had an alcohol use disorder (AUD), 37.5 million who had a drug use disorder (DUD) and 8.0 million people who had both an AUD and a DUD.¹ 30% to 50% of injured patients have a positive blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at the time of trauma center admission.² If drug use is included, as many as 40%-60% of all patients seen in trauma centers are under the influence of alcohol or other substances of abuse (SOAs) when admitted.³ Also, among members who have screened positive for alcohol or other drug misuse, abuse, or dependence, 26% have a negative toxicology screen.² McGlynn and her colleagues at RAND found that only 16% of traumatically injured inpatients had any medical record indication that substance use had been assessed. They found that 7% are intoxicated at admission and another 20% screen positive for alcohol misuse or abuse.⁴

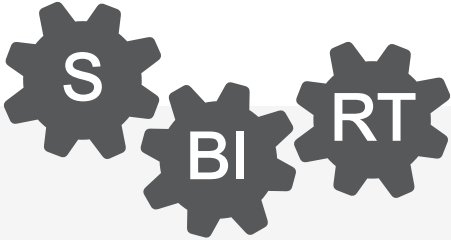
What is Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT)?

SBIRT is an evidence-based approach to identifying substance misuse and reducing excessive use of substances and substance use disorders. SBIRT is unique in that it screens for all types of substance use, not just substance dependence. Each part of the SBIRT process provides information and assistance tailored to the individual members and their needs. Universal substance use disorder treatment assists individuals struggling with diagnosed conditions such as alcohol or drug use disorders. The SBIRT model begins with a focus on risk and targets individuals at risk for developing a substance use disorder. SBIRT focuses on opportunities to educate individuals about hazardous use while helping them to reduce or dismiss it.

1	Conduct screening								
2	Determine level of risk								
3	<table><tr><td>No to low risk?</td><td>No further intervention</td></tr><tr><td>Moderate risk?</td><td>Brief intervention</td></tr><tr><td>Moderate to high risk?</td><td>Brief treatment</td></tr><tr><td>Severe risk or dependency?</td><td>Referral to specialty treatment</td></tr></table>	No to low risk?	No further intervention	Moderate risk?	Brief intervention	Moderate to high risk?	Brief treatment	Severe risk or dependency?	Referral to specialty treatment
No to low risk?	No further intervention								
Moderate risk?	Brief intervention								
Moderate to high risk?	Brief treatment								
Severe risk or dependency?	Referral to specialty treatment								

The core components of SBIRT

About 20% of members screened will require a brief intervention while 5% will need a referral to specialty treatment. The remaining 75% will include abstainers and low risk alcohol users who will simply require positive reinforcement for continuing to abstain or to reduce use further:



Screening: Universal screening using a brief, validated questionnaire to determine the use and severity of alcohol, illicit drug, and prescription drug use to inform the appropriate intervention level. No blood or urine test is administered.

Brief intervention: Brief motivational and awareness-raising intervention given to those whose substance use is putting their health and wellbeing at risk (five to 30 minutes). The intervention is performed onsite following the screening.

Referral to treatment: Referral to specialty care for members with high-risk substance use (and members with a possible substance use disorder). The practitioner helps members access specialized treatment, select treatment facilities, and obtain authorizations from insurance. After a referral is made, follow-up phone calls with the member or treatment staff are part of the collaboration to ensure care.

Where can SBIRT be implemented?

Primary care centers, physicians' offices, hospitals, emergency departments (ED), trauma centers, STD clinics, colleges, and schools

Who can perform SBIRT?

SBIRT is implemented by various providers, including physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, nurses, health or substance use treatment counselors, prevention specialists, care managers, and other health or behavioral health staff.



Is SBIRT effective?

Yes! Several credible research studies have published the results of SBIRT's efficacy, including comprehensive data on individual health outcomes and cost-saving measures. For example, in Drug and Alcohol Dependence (Madras, 2009),⁵ SBIRT has been shown to:



- Decrease harmful alcohol use by 39% and lower illicit drug use by 68%.
- Decrease overall healthcare costs by reducing ED visits and inpatient admissions.
- Decrease rates of arrest, homelessness, and mental health problems.
- Increase rate of employment and improve general health.

Research has also shown that among those requiring special treatment, brief interventions have increased the percentage of people who show up for their first substance use disorder treatment appointment from 5% (among controls) to between 55% and 65% (among those receiving SBIRT services). Of those who received SBIRT services, 90% to 95% continued to be involved in some substance use disorder treatment or 12-step meeting on follow-up.⁶

Why is SBIRT effective?



It is a proven approach for better health —

SBIRT is a proven approach to improving member outcomes and decreasing hospital ED and inpatient admissions.



SBIRT expands the continuum of care —

concentrating on prevention before alcohol and drug use escalates to problematic use or a substance use disorder by identifying otherwise overlooked members. Screening helps detect dangerous use, while relevant interventions are planned for at-risk and risky behaviors.



SBIRT prevents future problems —

by detecting high-risk behavior and current health problems related to substance use early before more severe problems develop. This makes SBIRT an essential part of wellness and prevention programs.



SBIRT creates better member outcomes —

by improving member care, developing treatment outcomes, and increasing provider and member satisfaction. SBIRT allows providers to educate members about the connection between their health issues and their substance use.



SBIRT creates positive financial returns —

as a reimbursable, cost-saving, and cost-effective practice. SBIRT is billable to commercial health plans as well as Medicare and Medicaid.

Pre-screens

A pre-screen, also known as a brief screen, is defined by The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) as “a rapid, proactive procedure to identify individuals who may have a condition or be at risk for a condition before obvious manifestations occur.” It involves short questions relating to alcohol and drug use and must be administered before beginning a full screening. Many providers ask members the pre-screening questions first and then ask the complete screening questions if members score positive on the pre-screening questions. Pre-screens are considered part of routine medical management and are not a separately reimbursable service. Depending on the pre-screening tool used, one or more **yes** replies may indicate the need for a full screen.

Adult screening

Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test (AUDIT)⁷

Developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and evaluated over a period of two decades. It has been found to provide an accurate measure of risk across gender, age, and cultures.

Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Abuse Involvement Screen Test (ASSIST)⁸

Developed by the WHO and an international team of substance use researchers as a simple method of screening for hazardous, harmful, and dependent use of alcohol, tobacco, and other psychoactive substances.

Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10)⁹

Includes questions about involvement with drugs, not including alcoholic beverages, during the past 12 months. *Drug use* refers to the use of prescribed or over the counter drugs in excess of what's directed and any non-medical and/or illegal use of drugs.



Pregnant women screening

Tolerance, Annoyance, Cut Down, Eye Opener (T-ACE)¹³

A four-item questionnaire developed to assess alcohol use in pregnant women. It provides obstetricians and gynecologists with a brief and useful way to identify members at risk for drinking amounts which may be dangerous to the fetus.

Tolerance, Worried, Eye Opener, Amnesia, K/Cut Down (TWEAK)¹⁴

A five-item scale which was developed originally to screen for risky drinking during pregnancy.



Adolescent screening

Car, Relax, Alone, Forget, Family or Friends, Trouble (CRAFFT)¹⁰

An alcohol and drug behavioral health screening tool for use with children under the age of 21 and is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Substance Abuse for use with adolescents.

Screening to Brief Intervention (S2BI)¹¹

A seven-item tool is used to assess the frequency of alcohol and substance use (for example: tobacco, marijuana, prescription drugs, illegal drugs, inhalants, herbs, or synthetic drugs) among youth and adolescents from 12 to 17 years of age.

NIAAA Alcohol Screening for Youth¹²

Uses a two-item scale to assess alcohol use among youth and adolescents between nine and 18 years of age. The first question determines the frequency of friends' drinking, and the second question assesses personal drinking frequency.

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