LOOMING, HIDDEN HEALTH CRISIS FOLLOWING COVID-19

Health authorities have identified more than 814,587 COVID-19 cases throughout the United States with 43,796 deaths as of April 21, 2020. To mitigate the tremendous cost to American lives, stay-at-home orders have been implemented in many states, with people classified as "non-essential" losing their jobs as employers have been forced to close their businesses due to lack of income. As a result, a record 26.5 million Americans filed first-time jobless claims since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, exceeding the nearly 9 million who lost jobs from 2008 to 2010 amid the "Great Recession".

The American public are facing multiple threats from the COVID-19 pandemic, including, but not limited to:

- **Unrelenting fear** of catching this highly contagious virus, and possibly of death since no cure exists, leading to mass panic and PTSD
- **Increased unemployment**, economic hardship and unrest as businesses remain closed
- **Extreme social isolation** with restaurants and bars closed, and sporting events and religious services cancelled

These threats adjacent to COVID-19 will result in increased rates of alcoholism and drug abuse that may not be realized until the pandemic subsides.

What is the basis for this prediction?

- Stress and PTSD are clearly linked to increased rates of alcoholism and substance use.\(^5\)\(^8\)
- Not accounting for the COVID-19 pandemic, Louisiana was already ranked as one of the most "stressed" states for Americans in 2020.\(^9\)
- Exposure to the World Trade Center disaster of September 11 was associated with increased binge drinking, alcohol dependence\(^10\)\(^11\), cigarette smoking\(^3\) and marijuana use\(^12\)\(^13\).
- **Traumatic events and stressors** related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita resulted in increased post-disaster alcohol use and abuse.\(^14\)

- **Unemployment** was strongly and robustly associated with the problematic use of substances during the economic shock of the Great Recession 2008–2009.\(^15\)
  - The **jobless rate in Louisiana** is expected to hit 7.1%.\(^16\)

New unemployment claims in the United States soared in the second half of March.

Economic and social recovery will be painfully slow once the COVID-19 pandemic begins to recede. If the United States is unprepared to meet the secondary crisis of unchecked alcoholism and substance use, the subsequent costs to lives and society will be unprecedented.

### NEEDED NOW

- **Robust identification and discussion of, and support and funding for, substance use and mental health disorders.**

Direct all questions, comments and other response to Dr. Nicholas Goeders, Head of Pharmacology, Toxicology & Neuroscience (LSU Health Shreveport) and Executive Director Louisiana Addiction Research Center: NGoede@lsuhsc.edu or 318-675-7850
Reference List


9. [https://wallethub.com/edu/most-stressful-states/32218/](https://wallethub.com/edu/most-stressful-states/32218/)


