



What is  
Oxford House?

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT OXFORD HOUSE

### **Q. What is the philosophy behind Oxford House™?**

The philosophy behind Oxford House™ is three-fold: [1] self-help is the bedrock of recovery, [2] disciplined democracy is key to living together successfully, and [3] self-support builds sobriety comfortable enough to avoid relapse.

### **Q. How did Oxford House™ get started?**

In 1975, a tight budget in Montgomery County, Maryland led to a decision to close one of the four county-run halfway houses. The thirteen men living in the halfway house to be closed rented the building and decided to run it themselves. They immediately decided to change the halfway house rule that limited stays to six months because they had witnessed that when a person was required to leave because the time was up they almost always relapsed within thirty days of leaving. That was an important change because recovering individuals take different lengths of time to become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse.

### **Q. Who manages an Oxford House™?**

Oxford Houses are democratically self-run by the residents themselves. They elect officers to serve for terms of six months. They are similar to a college fraternity or sorority or a small New England town. Officers have fixed terms of office to avoid bossism or corruption of egalitarian democracy.

### **Q. What is the role of outreach workers? Do they manage an individual Oxford House™?**

Oxford House, Inc. employs outreach workers primarily to assist in the expansion of Oxford House™ and some states provide grants to Oxford House, Inc. to support outreach activities. Outreach workers do NOT manage Oxford Houses. All Oxford Houses are self-run by the residents themselves. Outreach workers work primarily with new houses, helping them get organized, teaching them the system of operations, and serving as resource persons. All Oxford House, Inc. outreach workers are in recovery and all have lived in an Oxford House™. They have a good understanding of how the system works and can be very helpful to Houses that seek their assistance.

### **Q. How long can someone live in an Oxford House™?**

A recovering individual can live in an Oxford House™ for as long as he or she does not drink alcohol, does not use drugs, and pays an equal share of the house expenses. The average stay is about a year, but many residents stay three, four, or more years. There is no pressure on anyone in good standing to leave.

### **Q. Why are Oxford Houses™ self-run?**

Oxford Houses™ are self-run because: (1) this permits individuals in recovery to learn responsibility, and (2) the lower cost associated with self-run housing permits extensive replication of houses. Because the houses are self-run and self-supported, it is easier to expand capacity to meet demand rather than requiring individuals to leave in order to make room for newcomers. When demand exceeds the supply of beds, it is traditional in Oxford House™ for several existing residents to find another house to rent and expand capacity.

**Q. How difficult is it to find houses to rent?**

It is no more difficult than for an ordinary family to find a house to rent. Each Oxford House™ is an ordinary single-family house with at least two bathrooms and four or more bedrooms. Most, if not all, of the bedrooms should be large enough for two twin beds. Newcomers in particular should have roommate. This discourages isolation and helps the newcomer to get the full benefit of recovering individuals helping each other to become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse.

**Q. Don't zoning laws limit where a group of unrelated individuals can rent a house?**

Fortunately, the 1988 Amendments to the Federal Fair Housing Act prohibit discrimination against handicap individuals covered by the Act including individuals recovering from alcoholism and/or drug addiction. Local governments are required to make a reasonable accommodation in their zoning laws to enable covered individuals to effectively deal with their disability.

**Q. Are recovering alcoholics, drug addicts and those with co-occurring mental illness really covered under the law?**

Yes, because alcoholism, drug addiction and mental illness are handicapping conditions. Oxford House, Inc. litigated the issue and in 1995 the United States Supreme Court considered the issue in *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc. et al.* 514 US 725 (1995). In that case the Court found that alcoholics and drug addicts met the definition of 'handicap' within the meaning the law and therefore are a protected class requiring that local governments make a reasonable accommodation in zoning laws restricting groups of unrelated persons to live together. Since then, courts have found that the same protection applies with respect to fire safety standards and rates charged property owners for property insurance coverage. In fact, Oxford Houses™ must be treated the same as ordinary family homes.

**Q. How can one get into an Oxford House™?**

Any recovering alcoholic or drug addict can apply to get into any Oxford House™ by filling out an application and being interviewed by the existing members of an Oxford House™. The application is then considered by the membership of the House and, if there is a vacancy and if 80% of the members approve, the applicant is accepted and moves in. If an applicant does not get voted into one house, he or she should try another house in the area. The Oxford House™ website contains information about "How to Apply" to live in an Oxford House.

**Q. What if there is not an Oxford House™ in the area or there are no vacancies in any Oxford House™ in the region?**

Any group of recovering individuals can start a new Oxford House. All they need to do is to find a house to rent in the name of the group, and apply to Oxford House, Inc., for a temporary charter. The house must be able to accommodate at least six residents. There is no charge for an Oxford House™ charter but residents must agree to adhere to the charter conditions.

**Q. What is an Oxford House™ Charter?**

An Oxford House™ Charter gives a group of six or more recovering individuals the right to call itself an Oxford House™ and to use the Oxford House™ system of operations set forth in the Oxford House Manual©, forms and other publications. There is no charge for the charter but it has three conditions: [1] the group must be democratically self-run following the procedures of the Oxford House Manual©, [2] the group must be financially self-supporting and pay all its own bills, and [3] the group must

immediately expel any resident who returns to using alcohol or illicit drugs. The Charter is granted on a temporary basis for the first six months to ensure that a new group understands and practices the 40-year old standard system of operations. Once a group has demonstrated that it understands and practices the standard system of operations, it is granted a Permanent Charter, which has the same three basic conditions – democratically self-run, self-supported and requiring the expulsion of any resident who relapses.

**Q. Is there any financial aid available to start a new Oxford House™?**

Yes, some states have in place a revolving loan fund that can make loans to cover the group's first month's rent and security deposit (up to \$4,000) for a house in a good neighborhood. If a group gets a start-up loan from the fund, the group must repay the loan within two years in 24 installments. Check the Single State Director list at the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) under "Links/State Gov" to get a telephone number or an email address for your state's substance abuse office and ask them if a loan fund is available. If it is not available, groups can pool resources to come up with the first month's rent and security deposit on a house or find a local source such as a church, foundation, business or treatment provider for a start-up loan. Historically, all kinds of funding sources have help to start new Oxford Houses. The first Oxford House™ was started because a member of AA loaned the men \$750 for the first month's rent. Repayment of the loans replenishes the loan fund and makes loans to start future houses possible.

**Q. Can an Oxford House™ be started without a loan from the state?**

Yes, the prospective residents of the House can find a suitable house, rent it, put up the security deposit and pay the first month's rent themselves. Oxford House, Inc. consideration of a Charter application is not dependent on a state revolving loan fund as the source of the financing.

**Q. Can both men and women live in the same Oxford House™?**

No. Experience has shown that Oxford Houses work for both men and women, but not in the same house.

**Q. What is the "ideal" number of individuals to assure a well-run self-run, self-supported recovery house?**

Experience has shown that houses with 8 to 15 members work very well. Oxford House, Inc. will not charter a house with fewer than six individuals because experience has shown that it takes at least six individuals to form an effective group. Generally, the average number of residents in an Oxford House is about 8.2. It varies a little depending on the particular houses in the national network of Oxford Houses. It is always good to have several rooms in a house that can accommodate two individuals because loneliness, isolation and self-pity can lead a newcomer to relapse. Having a roommate is a good way to learn re-socialization and avoid the loneliness and isolation that can lead to relapse.

**Q. How much sobriety or clean time is needed before an individual can be accepted into an Oxford House™?**

There is no specific amount of sobriety needed. Generally, an individual comes into an Oxford House following a 28-day rehabilitation program or at least 5 to 10-day detoxification program. Also many come into an Oxford House after working a 12-Step program and finding that their living conditions are making it very difficult to maintain recovery. Even married individuals in recovery sometime find that the space provided by one of the partners living in an Oxford House helps both partners to adjust to living life without one or both using booze or addictive mood-changing drugs.

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**Q. Do studies show that many Oxford House™ residents have co-occurring mental illness?**

Yes. A longitudinal study tested 897 Oxford House™ residents [604 men/293 women] using *Addiction Severity Index* and calculated the *Psychiatric Severity Index* [PSI] to identify residents with moderate or severe co-occurring disorders. The results showed that both those with severe and moderate PSI indications did well in staying clean and sober, avoiding hospitalization and functioning well over time. It also showed that about half of the sample tested positive on PSI with half of those having severe co-occurring disorders. [*American Journal of Community Psychology* 42 (2008) 143-153]. In layman's terms, those taking medication for co-occurring disorders learned to take the right amount of medication at the right time to control the co-occurring disorder and to also become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse. By living in a supportive living environment, those with co-occurring mental illness developed the habit of proper medication and sober living.

**Q. Are there Oxford Houses™ set up for special populations?**

There are some Oxford Houses™ for special populations. For example, around sixty Oxford Houses for Women accept women with children and a few Oxford houses accept men with children. There are also Oxford Houses that accept only recovering individuals who are gay. There are also houses that accept only deaf individuals. In one study comparing deaf individuals who lived in a house exclusive for deaf individuals and deaf individuals integrated into Oxford Houses™ with hearing residents, both cohorts did well. [See peer reviewed article "Oxford House: Deaf-Affirmative Support for Substance Abuse Recovery," Volume 151, No. 4, 2006 *American Annals of the Deaf*]

There are also Oxford Houses dedicated to Native Americans and there are Native Americans living in ordinary Oxford Houses™. While there have been no comparative Native American studies, those integrated into ordinary houses appear to do better than those in specialty houses.

An article in the Chicago Tribune featured several Latino houses in Chicago. The Oxford House Manual<sup>©</sup> and related forms have been translated into Spanish. Currently there are research studies on whether exclusively-Latino houses provide equal or better outcomes than integration of Latinos into ordinary Oxford Houses.

**Q. Do Oxford Houses™ serve veterans?**

Yes. At any given time there are about 3,000 Oxford House™ residents who have served in the military. During the course of a year, more than 5,000 veterans will live in the national network of Oxford Houses™. Some houses are made up of all veterans but, more typically, veterans are integrated into the normal Oxford House™ population.

**Q. How many individuals lived in an Oxford House™ during 2015?**

During 2015, over 32,000 individuals lived in an Oxford House™ for some or part of the year and most (about 80 percent) remained clean and sober.

**Q. How many times has the average Oxford House™ resident previously been through residential treatment?**

Oxford House residents have been through prior treatment an average a little over three times. About a quarter of residents enter an Oxford House after going through treatment once.

**Q. How many residents have served jail time?**

76% of Oxford House residents have served jail time. The average length of jail time is about one year with a range of few days to more than ten years. This is understandable since as many as many as 80% of the current jail and prison population are alcoholics and drug addicts. Oxford Houses seem to stop the recycling in and out of jail or treatment facilities.

**Q. What is needed to expand the number of Oxford Houses™?**

Development of statewide networks of Oxford Houses™ requires funding for: [1] a small start-up revolving loan fund, and [2] on-site technical assistance to teach residents the Oxford House™ system of operations. States can use some of their federal block grant funding to establish recovery home revolving loan funds and such funds must follow the requirements of 42 USC 300x-25 – the amended recovery home provision of the 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Block grant or other state funding can be used to contract with Oxford House, Inc. to provide trained and supervised outreach workers [field technicians] to find suitable houses to rent, recruit suitable residents and to teach those residents the system of operations. Each outreach worker costs Oxford House, Inc. about \$80,000 a year [average salary \$35,000, health insurance about \$7,000, FICA \$2,700 and \$35,000 expenses – car, phone, supplies, lodging]. The outreach worker also helps keep existing houses on track by helping to organize chapters, workshops and state associations. In Washington State, six outreach workers monitor 263 Oxford Houses™ and help develop new houses each year.

**Q. Has Oxford House™ gone worldwide?**

Yes, there are Oxford Houses™ in Canada, Australia, England and Ghana. Alcoholism and drug addiction are international problems and Oxford Houses can provide recovering individuals the opportunity to become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse.

**Q. How do I contact Oxford House, Inc. for more information?**

Website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org)

Email: [info@oxfordhouse.org](mailto:info@oxfordhouse.org)

Telephone: 301-587-2916

**Mailing Address:**

Oxford House World Services  
1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 300  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910



