

# SUBSTANCE USE RECOVERY IN THE WORKPLACE

## RECOVERY BENEFITS ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Workplaces that support employees' recovery from substance use disorders can reap benefits and contribute to the health of all of their workers. Benefits include increased productivity, improved morale, safer workplace, greater employee retention, and a more positive working environment.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT IS A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER?

- A substance use disorder (SUD) is the unceasing use of alcohol and/or drugs causing significant impairment such as health problems and/or the inability to meet daily responsibilities at work, school, and home.<sup>2</sup>
- The American Medical Association defines addiction to drugs as a disease because it causes changes in the way the brain functions.<sup>1</sup>
- Substance Use Disorders affect entire communities through impacts to workplace, criminal justice system, and healthcare.<sup>2</sup>
- According to the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (2019), 20.4 million people ages 12 and over experienced SUDs and more than 9.5 million also have a mental illness. As a result, illicit drug use added a \$49 billion burden to businesses due to lost workdays with prescription opioid misuse accounting for nearly \$8 million of that number.<sup>2</sup>
- Co-occurring substance use disorders and mental illness are common and often a symptom of adverse experiences or trauma.<sup>2</sup>



## WHAT IS RECOVERY?

- Recovery is the process of change where individuals with a substance use disorder voluntarily use treatment and long-term support to return themselves to good health, achieve wellness, live autonomous lives, and endeavor to become their best selves.<sup>2 3</sup>
- Recovery is achievable but it is a challenging process.<sup>2 3</sup>
- Having a store of internal and external resources to augment one's recovery is known as "recovery capital."<sup>1</sup> Examples of "Recovery Capital" may be having a counselor, stable housing, and/or a job.
- Employment is one of the highest priorities for a person in recovery and an indicator of positive outcomes.<sup>2 4</sup> Some of the positive effects include:
  - Lower recurrence
  - Higher abstinence
  - Cessation of unlawful activity
  - Less parole violations
  - Enhanced quality of life
  - Successful transition to productivity

- Workplaces that support recovery achieve a significant return on investment through increased productivity, retention, morale, & health status and decreased absenteeism and insurance costs.<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT IS A RECOVERY READY WORKPLACE?

Workplaces that commit to creating and sustaining an environment that supports employees who are seeking or living in recovery are considered to be recovery ready. By engaging in specific proactive policies, programs, and initiatives, workplaces can alleviate risks of initiating or continuing substance use disorders, increase access to substance use treatment, and provide ongoing recovery support. They may have, but are not limited to, any of the following employment policies and supports as part of their overall company recovery ready program:<sup>2 3</sup>

- Using a drug-free workplace policy and program to address the use or misuse of substances while on the job or that affect one's work
- Offering comprehensive health insurance that covers substance use and mental health treatment, as well as non-opioid pain management practices
- Providing an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to give workers the capability to get help independent of their employer
- Promoting health and wellness activities that keep focus on a healthy work force
- Educating employees on drug and alcohol awareness
- Training supervisors on workplace policies and procedures, communication, and referring employees for assistance
- Implementing recovery and recurrence planning to include:
  - Returning to work
  - Scheduling creatively
  - Making reasonable accommodations
  - Instituting a corporate culture of support
  - Sharing resources that support prevention
  - Utilizing peer support or recovery specialists
- Reducing the stigma of substance use disorders and recovery in the workplace through education
- Supporting a positive work culture with healthy, alcohol-free, employee social events



<sup>1</sup> CT Department of Labor, CT Department of Public Health, & Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. (2021, January 1). The Recovery Friendly Toolkit. Retrieved from [https://www.recoveryworksct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DHMAS001\\_RFW-Toolkit-Full-Update-121021.pdf](https://www.recoveryworksct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DHMAS001_RFW-Toolkit-Full-Update-121021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA. Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education - [https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA\\_Digital\\_Download/pep21-pl-guide-6.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/pep21-pl-guide-6.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> CDC-NIOSH. (2020, July 27). Workplace Supported Recovery Program. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/opioids/wsrp/default.html#b>

<sup>4</sup> Laudet, A. B., & White, W. (2010). What are your priorities right now? Identifying service needs across recovery stages to inform service development. *Journal of Substance Use Treatment*, 38(1). doi:51-59

<sup>5</sup> Live Unites Us. (2021, August 25). Recovery Friendly Workplaces: Supporting Employers and Employees. Retrieved from <https://pasdc.hbg.psu.edu/ddapstigma/AugWebinarRecoveryFriendlyWorkplaces.pdf>

