



# Recovery From Substance Use Disorders: A Guide for Employers

Problems with alcohol or drugs occur among millions of people who are employed. To help address these problems in the workplace, companies can make an effort to be in touch with their employees and provide a supportive alcohol and drug-free workplace. Companies that take such actions can see substantial corporate benefits. By taking a proactive approach and encouraging employees and corporate managers with these problems to seek help, employers actually can promote increases in employee performance, motivation, and morale, while also boosting customer satisfaction and financial savings.



Because so many people affected by substance use disorders are employed, employers play an important role in helping guide managers and employees toward recovery. Employers can provide a supportive work environment through a comprehensive drug-free workplace program.

**These programs typically include:**

- A clear company policy on substance use
- Employee education
- Supervisor training
- An employee assistance program (EAP)
- Drug testing (when appropriate)

The costs and benefits of workplace policies are the primary considerations for businesses; no single solution will work for every organization. But reviewing various approaches to substance use disorder treatment and recovery will help employers make the right decisions for their businesses.

**Using EAPs to Assess and Refer Employees for Treatment**

In the workplace, the tasks of recognizing a particular employee's need for treatment and referring that person to a treatment program can be done through corporate efforts that are backed by the support of all employees in the office. This ensures that employees who need treatment get to an appropriate treatment program. Employer support can begin by providing supervisors with training on how to recognize the signs of substance use disorders based on job performance, as well as guidance for intervening and making appropriate referrals. Employers also can educate all of their workers that alcohol and drug addiction are treatable diseases and treatment is effective.

As an employer, you can offer an employee assistance program (EAP). An EAP can provide confidential problem identification, short-term counseling, referrals to treatment, and follow-up services to help resolve employees' problems.

**Access to Treatment**

Employees with substance use disorders often turn to their employers for help in obtaining access to treatment, which employers may provide as part of their drug-free workplace programs. These programs are tailored by a company to promote a safe and productive workplace.

Such programs may include workplace policies that increase employees' access to treatment, along with EAPs that not only provide referral to treatment, but also offer employee education, supervisory training, and both short-term and continuing treatment services. These elements can help create an environment that encourages access to treatment, support for recovery, and the return

of the employee to productive work. Employers can ensure that an employee who needs treatment experiences a smooth transition back into the workplace during and after receiving treatment by creating a supportive work environment.

### **Health Care Coverage**

In addition to helping employees find treatment for substance use disorders, employers can offer private health insurance plans that cover a full range of treatments for employees and their families. This can be difficult with today's economy, where employers are trying to cut costs. Programs such as EAPs can be particularly susceptible to the financial pressures of the healthcare market, even though they have the potential to deliver vital services.

In an economy where employers look to cut costs, providing additional covered services may not appear cost effective. In the long term, however, the opposite is often true. In some cases, integrating addiction treatment with medical treatment can cut the cost of medical treatment in half.

**The following actions by employers help create not only a drug-free workplace, but a healthy environment that supports treatment and recovery:**

- Offer flexible hours to allow people in treatment to attend meetings, support groups, and counseling sessions.
- Create a mentoring program for new employees to eliminate the anxieties that are typically present when starting a new job.
- Recruit workplace-recovery sponsors to help keep people on track. These workers can be a valuable resource for an employer.
- Offer life skills training for employees and supervisors. This can include stress and time management and communication skills. Such training often has a positive impact on overall job performance.
- When possible, offer health insurance to all employees. This can significantly relieve stress and may encourage someone with a substance use disorder to enter treatment.

- Plan work-related social events sensitively and carefully, ensuring all employees are comfortable with the atmosphere.
- Always respect confidentiality. Employers must recognize and appreciate the delicate balance between wanting to help and an employee's need and desire for privacy.



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