



# Recovery Friendly Workplace

# TOOLKIT

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## WELCOME

Thank you for taking this step in learning more about Recovery Friendly Workplaces. We believe that employers play a critical role in addressing substance use and substance use challenges, and we want to make it easier for you to better understand how to create and maintain recovery friendly practices in your company.

Recovery is good for business! Employers are becoming more proactive in recognizing the economic and cultural benefits of being better informed about substance use and ways to support talent who are seeking help or in recovery. Savings for employers include:

- Employees who get effective substance use treatment and recovery support can, on average, **avoid \$8,817 in annual costs**.
- Employees in recovery take less unscheduled leave than their colleagues. On average, they **miss 13.7 fewer work days** than employees with an active substance use disorder and 3.6 fewer work days than an average employee.
- Employees in recovery stay with their employers at almost identical rates as their co-workers. And, compared to those with active addictions, employees in recovery can **save their organization up to \$4,000** in turnover and replacement costs.
- Employees in recovery **save an average of \$536 per year** in healthcare utilization costs compared to those with an untreated substance use disorder.

Employers have felt the impact of substance misuse for decades through absenteeism, loss of productivity, safety issues and poor job performance. Through Recovery Friendly Workplaces, we can accomplish a number of things. We can fight the stigma associated with the disease of addiction and encourage employees to get help sooner by providing resources that meet people where they're at and support their own, unique recovery pathway. There are many ways to recover from addiction, and it is important that we encourage employees to find what works best for them.

In this toolkit, we introduce what substance use disorder is, its impact in the workplace, and how to create and support a Recovery Friendly Workplace. The goal of this toolkit is to provide you with practical tools and information. Too often, we ignore problems and do not provide resources to help people take action. This is just a small sample of what you can do for your employees.

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# Introduction to Substance Use Disorder

## Defining Substance Use Disorder

The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) defines substance use disorder by stating:

*Substance Use Disorders occur when the recurrent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes clinically significant impairment, including health problems, disability and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school or home.*

Substance Use Disorder is more common than you may think. According to the [National Survey on Drug Use & Health](#), there are more than 20 million people in the United States who are affected by substance use disorder. This means that 1 in 3 households are directly impacted by this disease.

## The Science of Addiction

Contrary to what some may think, addiction is not a moral failing or lack of willpower. It is, however, a chronic and complex disease that affects the brain's reward system. The [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) (NIDA) states:

*Addiction is a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use that is compulsive, or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences.*

While the initial decision to use a drug is usually voluntary, the brain is altered over time, and the decision to use no longer becomes a choice.

There are three main risk factors that influence the likelihood of addiction:

- Genetics — The [NIDA states](#) that genetics account for between 40 and 60 percent of a person's risk of addiction
- Environmental — Family, school, home life, peer pressure and early exposure to substances can all influence the risk of addiction
- Developmental — [Studies show](#) that the earlier in life drug use begins, the more likely it will progress to addiction

## Recovery Is Possible

The good news is that substance use disorder is a treatable and manageable disease. As with other chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma and heart disease, SUD treatment should be ongoing and frequently assessed.

It's important to note that there are multiple pathways to recovery. Every individual is unique, and there is no "one size fits all" recovery program that will work for everyone. While only [10% of people with substance use disorders](#) receive traditional treatment services, there is an expanding network of [recovery support services](#) to address a person's needs throughout their lifetime, where they live, work and play.

People do not need to "hit rock bottom" before they receive help. Peer recovery coaching brings services upstream and helps people who are still employed, live at home with their families and have supportive relationships. Coaching services can also be used before, during, after or in lieu of treatment.

[SAMHSA defines recovery](#) as a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. There are an estimated **23 million Americans** in recovery who are creating healthy lifestyles, relationships and communities.

# Impact of Substance Use Disorder in the Workplace

## Substance Use Disorder Cost to Employers

Substance use disorders will cost our healthcare system and economy more than \$400 billion this year. Despite this large price tag, many employers don't know how SUD is affecting their bottom line.

Workplaces bear a large portion of the national cost, mostly in hidden fees associated with turnover, absenteeism, loss of productivity and healthcare expenditures. But exactly how much is your business being affected?

The [National Safety Council](#), [Shatterproof](#) and [NORC at the University of Chicago](#) teamed up to create "[The Real Cost of Substance Use to Employers Tool.](#)"



### Substance Use Employer Calculator

The calculator is an authoritative, easy-to-use tool providing business leaders with specific information about the cost of substance use (including prescription drug misuse, alcohol misuse, opioid addiction and heroin addiction, as well as misuse of other illicit drugs and marijuana) in their workplace based on the size of the employee base, industry and state.

[Calculate Your Costs](#)

### General SUD Employer Statistics

# 75%

of adults with untreated substance use disorder are in the workforce

[Link](#)



\$82 Billion  
in workplace productivity is lost annually due to heavy drinking

[Link](#)



Employees with untreated substance use disorder miss nearly **50% more days** than their peers [Link](#)



Employees who misuse alcohol are **270% more likely** to have a workplace accident [Link](#)

7 out of 10 employers have felt the effects of opioid drug misuse



[Link](#)

The annual cost of a single employee with an untreated SUD ranges from \$2,600 in agriculture to more than \$13,000 in the information and communications sectors. [Link](#)

Employers can save an average of \$8,500 for supporting each employee in recovery from substance use disorder. [Link](#)

The rate of occurrence and cost varies by industry with construction, entertainment, recreation and food service [having twice the national average](#) of employees with SUD. You can see how your industry is affected [here](#).

## Recognizing Troubling Behaviors

Workplaces are a critical point of contact for employees struggling with or recovering from a substance use disorder. Ideally, workplaces will provide individual, family and community support, and improve the well-being of workers. Workplaces should create work environments that proactively prevent substance misuse, reduce stigma, and encourage treatment and sustained recovery. What should you do if you suspect substance misuse in your workplace?

While the signs aren't always easy to detect, here are some troubling behaviors that may (but not always) indicate substance misuse:

- Increased absenteeism, both unexpected leave and excessive use of vacation/sick days
- Frequent and unexplained disappearance from office or worksite
- Poor and/or inconsistent job performance

- Increased accidents, both on the job and at home
- Difficulty or lack of concentration
- Increased errors, and poor judgment or decision-making
- A decline in physical appearance and hygiene

## Addressing SUD Related Issues

### *Notification Policy*

It is important for employees to know what actions to take if they suspect or observe substance use in the workplace. Employees should notify their supervisor or HR representative if they notice a co-worker exhibiting troubling behaviors. A swift response increases the chances of the situation being properly addressed.

## Addressing Issues with Employee

Employers should approach conversations about substance use disorder with caution and care. There should be legitimate, reasonable and documented observations that initiate the conversation.

Outside of drug testing, regularly occurring performance reviews are a good way to open the door to a more candid discussion about substance use. Consider asking questions such as, “I’ve noticed that you have missed quite a few deadlines in the past month. Your performance has declined, and it appears that you are having trouble concentrating. Is everything OK? Is there anything I can help with?”

Some employees may take the opportunity to open up and share information about their substance use. In this case, the employer can begin discussing next steps and options (see *below*).

Denial of the issue can also occur. In this case, employers should move forward with standard procedures to address performance-related issues or inappropriate behavior. Clear expectations and consequences should be set. Continued performance discussions and any related issues should be addressed according to company disciplinary policies.\*

Any and all disciplinary actions need to be based on performance, conduct and adherence to workplace policies. They cannot be based on suspicion of addiction or substance use disorder.



The Society of Human Resource Management offers [recommendations](#) accommodating workers with addiction or mental health conditions.

*\*These are suggested practices. Employees, managers, supervisors, and HR professionals should refer to their internal policies and procedures. Some employers and industries may have a [legal obligation](#) to address substance use disorder in the workplace.*

## Providing Options

Once an employee has opened up and confirmed substance misuse or substance use disorder, there are a variety of options that an employer can provide.

- Recovery Coaching Services — Peer recovery coaching allows employees to remain employed throughout the coaching process. Services are done by phone, easy to access, and traditionally come at no cost to the employee.
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) — Some employers may offer Employee Assistance Programs, which can provide resources for those seeking help related to substance use disorder.

- Treatment — There are employees who may benefit from inpatient or outpatient treatment. In this case, employers can help by providing treatment options with a resource such as the [Addiction Treatment Locator, Assessment, and Standards Platform](#) or [FindTreatment.gov](#). Collaborating on a “Return-to-Work Plan” after treatment will help the employee feel confident for their return and eliminate concerns over losing their position.

### *Legal*

There are two sets of federal laws that *may* pertain to someone with substance use disorder in the workplace.

#### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

The Americans with Disabilities Act prevents an employer from discriminating against an employee simply for having a disability, disease or medical condition, such as substance use disorder.

Current alcohol or illegal drug use is not protected, but those in recovery or treatment are covered by the ADA.

[Learn More](#)

#### **Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**

The Family Medical Leave Act legally ensures that employees are able to take unpaid leave for serious medical conditions, including treatment for substance use disorder. Covered employees can take job-protected leave for a total of 12 workweeks in any 12-month time period for treatment that is administered by a healthcare provider or as a referral from a healthcare provider. However, not all companies or employees are eligible for FMLA.

[Learn More](#)

## Benefits of Recovery

While the cost of untreated substance use disorder can be high, recovery is good for business! Employees in recovery improve productivity, decrease healthcare costs and reduce workplace injuries.

Investing in helping workers get effective substance use treatment can, on average, avoid \$3,200 in costs annually for each employee who recovers. ([link](#))

### *Absenteeism*

Employees in recovery take less unscheduled leave than their colleagues. On average, they miss 13.7 fewer days than employees with an active substance use disorder and 3.6 fewer days than an average employee.

### *Turnover Rates*

Employees in recovery stay with their employers at almost identical rates as their co-workers. And, compared to those with SUD, employees in recovery can save their organization up to \$4,000 in turnover and replacement savings.

### *Healthcare Costs*

Employees in recovery save an average of \$536 a year in healthcare utilization costs compared to those with untreated substance use disorder.

People in recovery often have a high degree of self-awareness, resilience, compassion, dedication and understanding. These skills and behaviors are often highly sought after by employers due to the positive impacts the employee can have on a team, company and culture.

# Creating a Recovery Friendly Workplace

## Companywide Statement

Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace promotes the physical health and mental wellness of your employees. Now that you've made the commitment to becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace, ensure that your employees know!

Making a companywide declaration will increase awareness of your commitment to the Recovery Friendly Workplaces initiative. Here is an example statement:

*"COMPANY has made a commitment to become a Recovery Friendly Workplace. We value the health and safety of all our employees and are dedicated to helping those with substance use disorder. We are also committed to fighting the stigma associated with addiction and mental health. We intend to promote positive changes within our workplace and the community."*

Once your declaration is completed, you can share the good news through companywide emails, newsletters, social media postings, and at companywide meetings and events. Don't shy away from sharing this information on a regular basis until it becomes part of your workplace culture.

## Assessing Current Health and Safety Practices

As you start to create a Recovery Friendly Workplace, it is important to assess your current health and safety practices. Reflecting on the following questions will provide you with an understanding of the gaps that may exist within your organization.

- Does your organization have a [high rate of substance use disorder](#)?
- What resources do you currently offer for employees seeking help related to SUD and mental health? Do all employees know of current offerings?
- Does your organization employ individuals in the [safety- and security-sensitive industries](#)?
- Has your organization been impacted by substance use or misuse in the past? How was the situation handled, and what could be improved?
- Are employees educated on substance misuse and what to do if they observe troubling behavior?
- What ideas do your employees have for supporting recovery in the workplace? Create an anonymous survey to better understand their needs and ideas.
- What are the gaps in your policies and procedures that would prevent an employee from accessing the help they need?

## Suggested Recovery Friendly Workplace Practices

Here are some suggested practices to promote recovery, reduce barriers and encourage overall healthier employees.

### *Suggested Recovery Friendly Workplaces Practices*

- Share the Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative with new employees.
- Ensure that current employees are aware of all available health and wellness programs.
- Be proactive in addressing substance use disorder related issues.
- Provide employees with resources (*see below*) to support recovery for themselves and their families.
- Work with a local [Recovery Community Organization](#) to offer on-demand Recovery Coaching Services.
- Ensure that supervisors and employees receive yearly training and education on substance misuse and substance use disorders.
- Support employees who seek treatment, hospitalization or temporary leave.
- Develop a Return-to-Work Plan for those returning from treatment to alleviate stress and set expectations. Recovery coaching can provide and support an aftercare plan to help sustain the positive outcomes following treatment.
- Promote a message of hope in recovery.
- Design safeguards to protect the confidentiality of employee health information.

## Employee Education

### *Prescription Medication*

The coverage of prescription medication continues to be an essential part of employer health-care plans. However, with the [surge in opioid addiction and overdose](#), it's important to educate employees on the proper disposal of unused opioids. See the resource '[How People Obtain Prescription Pain Relievers They Misuse](#)' for more information.

Share this [Safe At-Home Medication Disposal](#) with your employees.

### *Overdose Prevention Trainings*

On average, [136 Americans die every day](#) from opioid overdoses. And, a [recent report](#) showed that Americans are more likely to die of an opioid overdose than from a car accident. Education is key to overdose prevention, and there are free naloxone trainings that provide employees with the tools needed to save a life. [Naloxone](#) is a medicine that rapidly reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.



### [GetNaloxoneNow](#)

Get Naloxone Now is an online resource for training people to respond effectively to an opioid overdose emergency. Employers can consider having naloxone at their worksites and offer training to employees on how to save a life.



# Creating an Ongoing Recovery Friendly Culture

## Fight the Stigma

Unfortunately, stigma still exists around substance use disorder and mental illness. “The biggest killer out there is stigma. Stigma keeps people in the shadows. Stigma keeps people from coming forward and asking for help. Stigma keeps families from admitting that there is a problem.”  
— Jerome Adams, U.S. Surgeon General

As [Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation](#) states, “Today, the stigma of addiction is seen as a primary barrier to effective addiction prevention, treatment and recovery efforts at the individual, family, community and societal levels.”

In addition to your organization becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace, there are other ways you can fight the stigma and create an ongoing recovery friendly culture:



## Change the Narrative

We all play a part in eliminating the stigma. We can start by:

**#1 Shattering the Myths:** Recognize that substance use disorder is a chronic disease, not a moral failing.

**#2 Changing the Language:** The way we talk about substance use disorder matters.

## Suggested language guide:

✘ Instead of Saying:	✔ Say:
“Addict,” “Junkie” or “Druggie”	“A person with substance use disorder”
”Abuse”	“Misuse”
“Dirty”	Actively Using
“Clean”	“In Recovery” or “Substance Free”

## Ongoing Recovery Friendly Workplace Culture Practices and Activities

Here are some additional ideas to establish an ongoing Recovery Friendly Workplace culture:

- Participate in at least one prevention and/or recovery focused community event each year
- Provide stress-management, wellness and self-care education
- Establish a relationship with a [local recovery community organization](#) (RCO) as a resource for employees
- Provide a variety of non-alcoholic options at companywide events (everyone will enjoy tasty non-alcoholic options)
- Encourage healthy after hour activities in addition to or in lieu of happy hour
- Send anonymous employee surveys to ask for feedback and suggestions surrounding the Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative

## Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiatives

The [New Hampshire Recovery Friendly Workplace](#) (RFW) initiative empowers businesses across New Hampshire to create work environments that are supportive to those in or seeking recovery, in addition to those who may have a loved one with SUD. Through this initiative, workplaces receive support and guidance from Recovery Friendly Advisors, regional Public Health Networks, and Recovery Community Organizations that help get them connected to SUD-related information, resources, and trainings. To learn more, [click here](#).

To learn more about the work that is being done in other states around Recovery Friendly Workplace, please access this folder: <https://bit.ly/RFWMulti-StateMap>, where you can download a clickable pdf that links to additional information on other states' efforts. To learn more about RFW's Multi-State Community of Practice, [click here](#).

## Examples of Companies Creating a Recovery Friendly Workplace Culture

### *Delta Airlines*

The company has long supported the mental health of its employees. Delta was recognized by the Washington Business Group on Health (2000) as an example of a large employer who had generous or near-parity levels of mental health and substance use disorder benefits through their employer-sponsored plan, long before the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008. Whether there is a medical condition, disability or short-term challenge facing an employee, Delta's support focuses on the person and finding ways for the employee to stay engaged in work.

Overview of Delta Airlines Workplace Initiatives [here](#)

### *Salesforce*

Marin Nelson is a Regional Vice President at Salesforce as well as co-founder of a new affinity group for Salesforce employees — SOBERforce: A community for any employee who is sober, for whatever reason (e.g., addiction, health, religious) and allies. Hear Marin discuss her Soberforce initiative [here](#).

# Resources and Continuing Education

## State Resources

### *Crisis Response Phone Numbers*

In a crisis or emergency situation, utilize this list of emergency response numbers. [VIEW >](#)

### *FindTreatment.gov*

[FindTreatment.gov](#) is a searchable directory and healthcare connection resource. It connects individuals to mental health and substance use disorder providers, physicians and care coordinators.

### *Recovery Community Organizations*

[Recovery community organizations](#) (RCOs) are independent, non-profit organizations led by local representatives in recovery. Follow the link to find an RCO in your area [VIEW>](#)

### *Recovery Housing*

Recovery housing can be a stepping stone back into everyday life for those leaving treatment. Visit the [National Association of Recovery Residences](#) to connect with your state affiliate on recovery residences.

## National Resources

### *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*

SAMHSA is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

- [National Helpline](#)
- [National Behavioral Health Treatment Locator](#)

### *Faces & Voices of Recovery*

Faces & Voices of Recovery is dedicated to organizing and mobilizing the 23 million Americans in recovery. They promote the rights of people in recovery and resources for recovery through advocacy, education and demonstrating the power and proof of long-term recovery. [VIEW >](#)

## Recovery Friendly Workplace Checklist

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace! Use the checklist below as a getting started guide for creating a healthy, safe and stigma-free work environment.

- [Download the Recovery Friendly Workplace Toolkit](#)
- Learn the basics of substance use disorder by reading pages 4-5 of the toolkit
- Calculate how much substance use disorder is costing your organization [here](#)
- Share the good news! Release a companywide statement about your commitment to becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace
- Reflect on the discussion questions in “Assessing Current Health & Safety Practices,” page 11
- Determine which recovery friendly practices your organization is going to implement (see pages 14 to 15 for examples)
- Host an educational meeting to discuss the Recovery Friendly Workplaces Initiative with employees
- Pick two ongoing Recovery Friendly Workplace practices to add to your internal event calendar. See page 15 for examples
- Add the state and national resources listed in the toolkit to your employee handbook or internal resource guide. (see page 16)

Thanks again for your commitment to the mental and physical health of your employees!

## Recovery Friendly Workplace Badge to display throughout the organization



# About the Peer Recovery Center of Excellence

The **Peer Recovery Center of Excellence (CoE)** is housed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Partners include the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, University of Texas-Austin, and University of Wisconsin-Madison, and our appointed peer led Steering Committee. Peer voice is at the core of our work and guides our mission to enhance the field of substance use peer support services.

The Peer Recovery CoE has four focus areas: Integration of Peers into Non-Traditional Settings, Recovery Community Organization Capacity Building, Peer Workforce Development, and Evidence-Based Practice & Practice-Based Evidence Dissemination. In addition to training and publications, the Peer Recovery CoE accepts technical assistance requests from any individual, organization, community, state or region in need of training relating to substance use disorder peer support services.

## Partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Peer Recovery CoE partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) to produce this toolkit. UW leads efforts within the Peer Recovery CoE related to Recovery Community Organization Capacity Building.

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The Recovery Friendly Workplace Toolkit was created to help teams implement the initial tools to recognize and support employees who are navigating substance misuse and substance use disorders. Workplaces and employees are symbiotic relationships — both depending on the other. With employment and purpose playing significant roles in the overall well-being of a person, it's critical that employers understand the powerful actions they can take in supporting a person's recovery journey. We appreciate and celebrate your efforts in taking the first steps in creating a recovery friendly workplace.

## Acknowledgment should also be provided to Kris Kelly and Nell Hurley for reviewing and revising the toolkit.

Kris Kelly is a woman in long-term recovery. Kelly is the Recovery Community Organizational Capacity Building manager for the Peer Recovery CoE as well as the Senior Administrative Program Specialist for Minnesota in SAMHSA Region 5, for the Prevention, Addiction and Mental Health Technology Transfer Centers. Utilizing her unique combination of work in the recovery field, local communities and national projects, Kelly contributes significantly to the field to accelerate the adoption and implementation of evidence-based and promising, recovery-oriented practices.

Nell Hurley is a woman in long-term recovery, currently serving as a Steering Committee member for the Peer Recovery CoE. Hurley is a passionate recovery advocate with direct experience providing and overseeing peer recovery support services as well as directing Recovery Community Organizations. She has served in a variety of roles within the addiction and recovery space. Demonstrating her commitment to the recovery community, Hurley has also served on national organizational boards and committees.

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D., is the Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the authors and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this product is intended or should be inferred.

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