

# RECOVERY FRIENDLY EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

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## Welcome to Change

In 2021, there were an estimated **107,622 drug overdose deaths** in the US (CDC) - the **highest on record** for overdose fatalities in a single year.

Today, **over 75% of employers say they have felt the impact** of drug and alcohol use. Lower productivity, increased absenteeism, and workers' comp premiums are just some of the costs employers have to absorb.

To keep the doors open, employers are thinking strategically about how to address substance use and support employees to overcome their substance use issues.

Use this toolkit to learn more about addiction, its impacts on your business, and how you can create a **Recovery Friendly Worksite**.

Helping you get back to business,

**Mary Drew**  
Founder & CEO

## CONTENTS

WHAT IS  
ADDICTION?

IMPACTS  
ON EMPLOYERS

STRATEGIES  
TO BE A RECOVERY  
FRIENDLY EMPLOYER

RESOURCES

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# NEW LEGAL REQUIREMENTS...

Both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protect full- and part-time employees with a history of substance abuse. *Under NH state law, the ADA applies to companies with 6 employees or more.*

The ADA prohibits discrimination against disability at any stage in the employment process, including hiring. The FMLA offers unpaid medical leave to employees with a serious medical condition, or for them to care for a family member with one.

**Find current ADA policies at <https://adainfo.us/addiction-rec-employment>**

Under the ADA and FMLA, the usual stipulations regarding substance use are:

- **Past or current alcohol addiction** qualifies as a disability (ADA) or serious health condition (FMLA).
- **Current legal drug use** qualifies as well—for example, someone who has been prescribed Percocet or Suboxone and is using it as prescribed.
- **Past illegal drug use** also qualifies, if the person is in recovery or in ongoing medical treatment.
- **Current illegal drug use** does NOT qualify. In NH, illegal drugs include opioids, prescriptions being taken other than as prescribed, and medical marijuana.

The ADA requires employers to make **reasonable accommodations** for employees with disabilities.

For those with active substance use issues, this usually means holding an employee's job while they go to treatment. For those in substance use recovery, reasonable accommodations most often include allowing employees to rearrange their schedules to attend wellness appointments, such as therapy, and support meetings.



## Who Becomes Addicted?

There are over 21 million people in the US affected by a substance use issue, which equates to 1 in 3 households directly impacted. In 2022, New Hampshire has the 6th highest rate of opioid-involved deaths in the country (*NSDUH*). So, why do some people get addicted and others don't?

- Family, peer influence, home life, abuse or trauma, and early exposure to use
- Genetics could account for 40-60%
- Timing - the earlier use begins, the more likely it will become an addiction later in life
- Psychological & mental health: stress, anxiety, depression, and psychiatric disorders drive use about 90% of the time (12)

## What Is Addiction?

**Addiction is a chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and compulsive use, despite harmful and negative consequences.**(*NIDA*)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines substance use disorder as occurring “when the recurrent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes clinically significant impairment including health problems, disability, and failure to meet responsibilities at work, school, or home (1).”

### ADDICTION IS NOT:

- A moral failing or lack of willpower
- A bad habit people can stop if they just try harder
- A problem only affecting low-income or uneducated people
- A choice

### ADDICTION IS:

- A disease that alters the brain
- A non-discriminatory, societal issue
- After the body physiologically adapts to the substance, the **choice to use is removed**

## IT PAYS TO KNOW...

Employers who understand the basics of addiction and how it affects people can offer effective workplace solutions to improve both their employee health and their bottom line.

“

75% of adults with untreated addiction are in the workforce. Exactly how much is your business being affected by substance misuse?

## DECIDING WHAT TO TRACK . . .

***Gather baseline data by pulling reports and stats, doing surveys and interviews, and making appearance and performance observations.***

- **Employee Turnover Rates** - new hire, training and re-trainings costs
- **Absenteeism** - including excessive use of vacation or sick days, frequent call-outs or no-call / no-shows, or frequently leaving work early
- **Decreased Productivity** - more errors, inconsistent performance, not meeting expected levels of production, and inability to concentrate
- **Safety Issues** - increased accidents at work and home, poor judgment calls, poor decision making, or ignoring safeguards and red flags
- **Physical Appearance & Habits** - behavioral changes, decline in appearance, frequent and long trips to the bathroom or vehicle, and signs of use (some examples are sluggish/slurred speech, swaying, or nodding off, as well as pupil dilation, wandering, or little focus)

## Why Become Recovery Friendly?

### (-) Decreased Costs

Employees who get treatment can **save \$3,200 in annual costs on average.**

Employees in recovery save an average of **\$536 a year in healthcare utilization costs.**

(New-futures.org, 2021)

### (-) Less Absenteeism

Employees in recovery take less unscheduled leave and miss on average 5 days fewer than employees in active addiction.

### (+) Retention & Productivity

Employees in recovery stay with employers at almost identical rates as co-workers, and can save their company up to \$4,000 in turnover and replacement costs.

### (+) Health & Wellness

A healthy workforce means lower turnover, higher productivity, and improved morale. Employees can also share resources with other family members.

**WHAT IS UNTREATED ADDICTION COSTING YOU?**

<https://www.nsc.org/forms/substance-use-employer-calculator>

# 12 QUICK STEPS TO GET STARTED . . .

01

## UPDATE POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Clearly written, all-inclusive, and supportive (rather than punitive) policies provide fair treatment for people with substance use issues and are the foundation of a comprehensive drug-free workplace program.

02

## REDUCE STIGMA & IMPROVE CULTURE

Validate those struggling with addiction. Allocate funds to help staff in need of treatment and to promote recovery friendly activities. Workplace culture should support holistic options for employee health.

03

## EDUCATE EMPLOYEES

Educate employees on the effects that substance use can have on health, job performance, family dynamics and work safety. **Talk openly about addiction** and provide access to local treatment resources.

04

## PROVIDE SUPERVISOR TRAINING

Supervisors are key to successfully addressing substance use. Employees who know there is managerial support are more motivated to change.

05

## IMPLEMENT DRUG TESTING

Drug testing helps to identify opportunities for intervention and to maintain a safe work environment for everyone. Refer people who test positive to a local recovery center or to treatment.

06

## IMPLEMENT FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

This helps employees meet recovery or treatment goals while still being productive. Allow employees time to meet with a recovery coach or attend a support group. Remember that people caring for family members with addiction may need resources and support too.

07

## START THE CONVERSATION

Addiction is very stigmatized, so talk openly about it and what people are going through. Share stories of recovery to help reduce stigma. **Use non-stigmatizing language** in newsletters and include resources for treatment and recovery, educational videos, and how to ask for help.

08

## ENCOURAGE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Allow regular breaks, encourage the use of vacation time, reduce mandatory overtime, and promote meaningful relationships & positive habits like sharing healthy recipes. Connect employees with physical fitness apps or programs through insurance.

# ALMOST THERE . . .

09

## ALLOW ONSITE SUPPORT GROUPS

Offer space for in-person or virtual support groups during work hours or after shifts. Consider hosting on-site meetings after hours or on weekends.

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## RESOURCES, RESOURCES, RESOURCES

Place resources for recovery supports and services throughout your worksite: waiting rooms, backs of bathroom doors, hallways, staff rooms, conference rooms, company vehicles, employee newsletters and emails.

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## OFFER ONSITE RECOVERY COACHING OR HIRE ONE!

Recovery Coaches can provide instant help to employees dealing with work, family, or life stresses, and can help to keep recovery strong in those more challenging moments. And they're good for morale!

12

## DEVELOP RETURN-TO-WORK AGREEMENTS

Employees who need a leave of absence to attend treatment can sign a return-to-work agreement outlining such terms as random testing, attending support meetings, and/or getting a recovery coach.

## Policies: Supportive vs. Punitive

### Sample Policy

*The purpose of this policy is:*

- (a) to meet requirements of applicable laws and regulations to ensure our workplace is free of illegal drugs;
- (b) to establish restrictions on work-related use of legal substances including alcohol, legalized marijuana, tobacco, and prescription drugs;
- (c) to address fit-for-duty behaviors, i.e. frequent calling in sick before or after holidays or weekends, cannot meet job expectations, and accidents due to substance use;
- (d) to explain steps to protect employees, identify problems, report to supervisors, and provide assistance.

### *Important Components*

#### 1. Purpose & Scope

- a. Definition of substance use
  - i. Substances covered, i.e. Rx controlled substances, medical marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, vaping products etc.
- b. Who is covered
- c. Applicable when & where

#### 2. Responsibilities

- a. Prohibited behaviors
- b. Drug testing circumstances
- c. Reasonable suspicion
- d. Employee rights
- e. Procedure for impaired workers

#### 3. Support

- a. Employee & supervisor training
- b. Assisting employees with addiction
  - i. Return-to-Work-Agreements

#### 4. Consequences of Violations

- SAMHSA

(1,2,8)



# MAKING THE CULTURE SHIFT: HOW TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES IN RECOVERY

**Flexible Schedules:** Allow flexibility, including remote working options or providing time during the day to attend support groups or meet with a coach or counselor.

**Talk:** Openly talk about getting help and finding recovery support. Use non-stigmatizing, supportive language to build an environment of inclusion & safety!

**Alcohol-Free Events:** Make staff gatherings alcohol-free, or offer a variety of non-alcoholic options and encourage use of a recovery buddy.

**Community Involvement:** Connect with Reality Check to provide employees with resources such as support groups, recovery coaches, and a safe place to hang out.

## DRUG TESTING

*Drug testing can keep your workplace safe & reduce costs from related accidents. It prevents employees from coming to work impaired, and may help with federal regulation and insurance requirements & compliance (1).*

### HOW?

Before conducting drug testing, get legal advice about state and federal laws.

### WHO?

Have an outside specimen collector come to your worksite, or send employees to a certified testing laboratory.

### WHAT?

Testing panels should include the most commonly used drugs relevant to your industry & geographic area.

### WHEN?

Pre-employment, periodically, with reasonable suspicion, after an accident, follow-up, last-chance agreement, post-treatment return-to-work, or at annual physicals.

### CONSIDER . . .

Clearly define your testing procedures in policies that outline when you test, why, and what will be the consequences of a positive result. Review reasonable suspicion, return-to-work agreements, and legal rights & confidentiality with your employees.

# Supervisor Training

## Purpose

Supervisors are critical to addressing substance use. When employees have supportive supervisors without bias or judgment, it becomes a **powerful motivator for positive change.**

## Some Possible Supervisor Trainings:

### SIGNS OF USE

~What to do when you suspect an employee is impaired at work or is otherwise struggling with addiction

### CRISIS INTERVENTION

~What to do in a suspected overdose or crisis situation

### ADDICTION 101

- ~ Drug & alcohol policies (reasonable suspicion, etc)
- ~ Addiction, treatment & recovery basics
- ~ Confidentiality & laws

### GIVING SUPPORT

- ~ Making referrals
- ~ Reintegration after treatment
- ~ Celebrating recovery



## THE DO'S & DON'TS . . .

### DO:

- Listen & observe
- Document & offer support
- Use motivational interviewing
- Focus on work performance
- Emphasize confidentiality
- Address performance-related issues and inappropriate behavior
- Set clear expectations & consequences

### DON'T:

- Assume you know
- Be aggressive
- Ignore signs
- Make accusations
- Jump to conclusions
- Diagnose or moralize
- Cover-up or enable
- Base disciplinary action on suspicions

*Stop problems before they arise.*

*Give supervisors skills to intervene and make referrals when performance or safety is affected. Provide honest and confidential access to treatment and recovery services.*

## policy is the best policy

Regardless of an employee's qualifying disability, under both the ADA and the FMLA - **and if the employer has so specified in their policies** - an employer is permitted to:

- prohibit the use of alcohol or illegal drugs at the workplace
- prohibit their employees being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs in the workplace
- hold their employees with substance use issues to the same standards of performance and behavior as all other employees
- test for illegal drugs
- enforce a "last chance" agreement for staff who test positive for prohibited substances at work, and a "return to work" agreement for staff coming back after a treatment program

The Recovery Friendly Workplace program encourages the implementation of **supportive rather than punitive policies** that empower employees to get the help they need and address substance use problems at their source. **We are happy to assist with modifying and updating your company policies to protect you and your employees.**



# EDUCATE EMPLOYEES

Provide education for employees to improve their understanding of problematic substance use, addiction, recovery supports, and available resources.

## OVERDOSE, GENERAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

More Americans die yearly from opioid overdoses than from car accidents (9). Narcan training is widely available (2). Protect and strengthen employees' health by offering a variety of trainings: Trauma, Suicide Prevention, Stigma, Pain Management, Social Connection and Mental Health. This sends a message of support for staff and their families and loved ones.

### TIP:

Reinforce information in flyers, meetings, emails, trainings, videos, even paycheck stuffers. Use broad topics like physical activity, nutrition, and stress or pain management, and incorporate information on addiction and substance use and its impacts on health, family, and work (7).

## ASKING FOR HELP & AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Employees should know about resources available to them and family members: proper disposal of Rx medications, local support groups, EAP programs, health insurance benefits, recovery centers, pain management options, and how to access addiction treatment.

Tell employees during staff meetings how to ask for help at work, such as through an EAP or Reality Check's website; place flyers with EAP & Reality Check's contact information around your workplace in cafeterias, conference rooms, staff meeting rooms, company vehicles, and bathrooms (7).

## BASICS: POLICY, ADDICTION & RECOVERY

Make all employees aware of your workplace substance use policies, including what to do if they suspect a colleague is using drugs or alcohol at work. Answer any questions they have.

Disseminate policy info aimed at encouraging employees who find it hard to ask for help – make sure they know they will be met with support.

Raise awareness about the impacts of substance use on safety, health, personal life, & work performance.

Provide a message of hope:

**Addiction is treatable and recovery is possible.**

## DON'T FORGET THE FAMILY . . .

**Substance use impacts the entire family.** Inform your employees' families about available resources and the importance of self-care during tough times.

Share what they can expect when trying to find treatment and that **they are not alone.**

Provide support and resources to navigate the process of securing treatment.

Refer family members to get help too. For example:

**Local Recovery Centers & Family Support Groups**

**211 - to get help accessing detox and residential treatment**

# It's a Win-Win.

YOU CAN HAVE HEALTHY EMPLOYEES  
**AND** GET BACK TO BUSINESS.

## Two Heads Are Better Than One

Addiction deserves all the same life-saving measures as any other disease. It also needs to be handled respectfully; ensure you are adhering to best practices around legal considerations and overall regulations.

Partnering with Reality Check offers you actionable resources and specialized support to navigate helping someone struggling with a substance use issue. When you provide comprehensive support to employees - everybody wins.

You can also add us as a resource alongside your EAP program if you have one.

Visit us at [realitychecknow.org](http://realitychecknow.org) or call  
to set up a free consultation.

**603.532.9888**

## OUR SERVICES . . .

### AT YOUR PLACE

- Staff training & education
- Assessments
- Crisis intervention
- Treatment & MAT referrals
- Recovery coaching
- Policy modification assistance

### AT OUR PLACE

- Private recovery coaching
- Wrap-around social services
- Remote tele-counseling options
- Support groups

### ONLINE

- Employer resource library
- Educational materials
- Cost analysis calculator



ON-SITE  
ASSESSMENTS

ON-SITE  
RECOVERY  
COACHES

ON-SITE  
CRISIS  
INTERVENTION

ON-SITE  
STAFF TRAINING



~ WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE ~

**INSTEAD OF . . .**

Addict, junkie, druggie:  
Dirty or clean:  
Former addict/drunk:

**TRY SAYING . . .**

*Person with a substance use issue*  
*Actively using or substance-free*  
*Person in recovery*



## Progress Check

- ( ) **Share your commitment in a company-wide declaration**
  - Assign members to lead the change
  - Communicate a pledge to your employees
  - Partner with a local recovery center
- ( ) **Examine drug-free policies & procedures**
- ( ) **Educate supervisors (*ongoing*)**
- ( ) **Educate staff (*ongoing*)**
- ( ) **Schedule community involvement**
- ( ) **Work to create an inclusive culture**
- ( ) **Schedule alcohol-free staff events and activities**
- ( ) **Remind employees often about available resources and share how to dispose of unused medication safely**
- ( ) **Develop online employee education about Rx drug misuse, alcoholism, and other drug addiction**



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