



Five Proactive Steps Employers Can Take: Opioids in the Workplace

Opioids are powerful prescription pain relievers that can cause impairment, addiction, and fatal overdose. The United States is experiencing an opioid epidemic and Pennsylvania has been hit particularly hard.

Opioid medications are both a health and a safety issue in the workplace. Fortunately, there are steps employers can take to keep their employees healthy and safe, and their companies productive.

A Drug-Free Workplace in Five Steps

Drug-free workplace programs are cost-effective plans that will help employers keep their employees safe and healthy. Effective programs should consist of these five components:

- ▶ **1. A Clear, Written Drug-free Workplace Policy**
The involvement of legal counsel and human resources is critical to ensure the policy includes protections for risk management, injury prevention, and liability.
- ▶ **2. Employee Education**
Make sure that employees receive information about how opioid medications could affect health, job performance, and safety. This includes:
 - Talking to doctors about non-opioid options for pain management
 - Avoiding driving and operating machinery while under the influence of drugs, including prescribed medications
 - Safe storage and disposal of medications
 - Not to share medications with family, friends, or colleagues
 - How to seek help for opioid addiction

While illegal drugs used to be the focus, it is now important to offer frequent reminders of the prescription drug policy for your workplace.
- ▶ **3. Supervisor Training**
Supervisors are able to provide employee education regularly during individual and team meetings. Managers should have up-to-date knowledge on opioids and they must understand company drug policy. They should also have set steps to follow if they suspect problematic drug use.
- ▶ **4. An Employee Assistance Program**
Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) offer people the option to access services for mental health and other personal concerns privately. Purchasing EAP services costs money, but research shows that they have positive returns on investment. While many companies have EAPs, few employees use them. Be sure that employees are aware of what an EAP is and how to use it for support.
- ▶ **5. Drug Testing**
A Drug-Free Workplace Policy was more easily enforced when illegal drugs were the only drugs banned under the policy. Now, the increased use of prescription medicines, especially opioid painkillers has created an important need to revisit these policies.



Five Proactive Steps Employers Can Take: Opioids in the Workplace

(continued)

Drug tests can be perceived as being highly intrusive, but they can be invaluable tools for preventing drug-related incidents and reducing risk. Before performing any drug test or adopting a drug-testing policy, employers must obtain expert legal advice that is current with both state laws and federal guidelines.

What drugs are essential to test for? Many companies still use a standard five-panel test, which does not detect certain opioids, including oxycodone (also known as Percocet). Oxycodone is the most commonly detected prescription painkiller in the workplace. Don't rely on the standard five-panel test to identify prescription opioid use among your employees.

Choose the test panel based on drugs that are commonly used in your area. For more information about local trends, consult with a testing laboratory or local addiction treatment center.

While illegal drugs used to be the focus, it is now important to offer frequent reminders of the prescription drug policy for your workplace.

Addiction Treatment for Employees

Opioid use changes the brain, which is one of the reasons that addiction is hard to overcome. But many people do recover from addiction and employer support often helps. Research has found that when workplaces monitored and supported treatment, their employees had better long-term recovery rates than when treatment was started because of friends and family members.

Recovery often requires long-term treatment with medications. Here are two different ways in which medication can be used:

Detoxification followed by intensive counseling and naltrexone is more effective than detoxification alone. Naltrexone is a medication that stops the brain from feeling the effects of opioids.

Medication-assisted treatment with either methadone or buprenorphine can be very effective. These prescribed drugs are opioids that help a person with an addiction feel normal and reduce cravings. Buprenorphine may cause less drowsiness or job impairment than methadone. A treatment provider can help determine what is appropriate for your workplace. Both buprenorphine and methadone can be offered on an outpatient basis. Because of serious changes to brain chemistry that happen as a result of opioid usage, many people remain on medication for months or a year and some for the remainder of their life. Like any other medical condition, this need not affect job performance.

There Are Ways to Help

In the unfortunate circumstance where an employee finds that he or she is addicted to opioid painkillers or heroin, help needs to be clear and accessible. Employer-sponsored treatment is more effective than treatment encouraged by family or friends. Retaining an employee following successful treatment is good for morale and the company's bottom line.

Resources

SAMHSA Drug Free Workplace Toolkit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit>
Drug Free Workplace PA: <https://www.drugfreeworkplacepa.org/>

Adapted with permission from the National Safety Council's "The proactive role employers can take: opioids in the workplace." Available online at: <http://www.nsc.org/RxDrugOverdoseDocuments/proactive-role-employers-can-take-opioids-in-the-workplace.pdf>

Employers and Painkillers: The Benefits of Addressing Opioid Use in the Workplace, the Risks of Ignoring It



Opioid addiction is a growing problem. Addiction to prescription opioids (painkillers like Vicodin and Percocet) has grown to epidemic proportions in the United States and Pennsylvania has been hit particularly hard.

Anyone can become addicted. One in five Americans say a family member has been addicted to prescription painkillers. In Pennsylvania and across the country, opioid addiction affects men and women of all ages and races, from small towns to big cities. Most people with unhealthy drug use are employed full-time.

What does that mean for you, as an employer? It means your employees have a growing risk of opioid addiction and some may already be struggling with addiction—whether you know it or not.

Addictions of any kind can cause problems at work. However, opioids are a special case because:

- They are medications that are sometimes prescribed for legitimate conditions. Americans see the risks of medications as smaller than they really are.
- Problems with prescription painkillers can lead to heroin use, which has severe consequences for families and workplaces.

As an employer, you can improve your company culture — and your bottom line — by taking steps to address at-risk opioid use and opioid addiction.

The Risks of Doing Nothing

Absenteeism

On average, workers who use prescription opioids non-medically are absent from work about three extra days per year. In fact, the effect of non-medical opioid use on absenteeism is greater than heavy alcohol use. Absenteeism due to opioid addiction cost American employers \$1.1 billion in 2007.

Healthcare Costs

Healthcare costs related to opiate addiction are skyrocketing. The number of private health insurance claims related to opioid dependence soared by 3,204 percent from 2007 to 2014.

On average, people with at-risk opioid use (possible addiction) cost employers nearly twice as much in annual healthcare expenses as those without at-risk use.

*As an employer,
you can improve
your company
culture — and your
bottom line — by
taking steps to
address at-risk
opioid use and
opioid addiction.*





Employees with addictions change jobs more often. Losing an employee and hiring someone new is expensive.

Employers and Painkillers: The Benefits of Addressing Opioid Use in the Workplace, the Risks of Ignoring It (continued)

There are many reasons that healthcare costs are higher for people with at-risk opioid use.

If prescribed, the medications themselves are costly. And opioid use is associated with a long list of other health problems, such as breathing problems, depression, infertility, poor digestion, and tooth decay, all of which can increase healthcare costs for employers. Research suggests that family members of people with addiction tend to incur more health care costs as well, which employers often cover.

Turnover

Employees with addictions change jobs more often. Losing an employee and hiring someone new is expensive.

It costs you about one-fifth of a worker's salary to replace her. Turnover is expensive because of productivity losses when someone leaves a job, the costs of hiring and training a new employee, and slower productivity until the new employee gets up to speed in his new job.

Relationships and Company Culture

By definition, addiction affects social functioning and fulfillment of obligations. At work, addiction can hurt an employee's productivity and ability to collaborate. This, in turn, affects other employees and the company as a whole.

Other employees are more likely to quit if they work with a person who has an addiction.

The Rewards of Taking Proactive Steps to Address Opioids

Workplaces can prevent opioid addiction

Research shows that drug-free workplace policies and employee assistance programs work well to reduce prescription drug misuse, particularly among younger workers.

Workplaces can help employees get back on their feet

When addiction treatment is required by employers, it is more likely to be successful. Pressure from the workplace helps people get into treatment earlier and gives them an ongoing reason to maintain recovery.

Resources

SAMHSA Drug Free Workplace Toolkit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit>

Drug Free Workplace PA: <https://www.drugfreeworkplacepa.org/>

Opioids and Your Workplace: A Guide for Small Businesses



The research is clear: if you have a drug-free workplace policy and an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), your employees are less likely to use drugs. Small businesses are less likely to have these policies and programs in place, leaving them more vulnerable to employees with drug problems. Drug use is a growing concern for employers in the midst of a nationwide opioid epidemic that has hit Pennsylvania particularly hard.

Almost all large companies check applicants for substance use, but only two-thirds of companies with fewer than 100 employees conduct pre-hire drug tests. As a result, small businesses are more attractive to applicants who use drugs, including opioid painkillers and heroin.

Want to Create Drug-free Policy?

See our Resource section at the end for tools, tips, and organizations that can help.

Opioid Use Affects Small Businesses More

Not only are small businesses more likely to hire and employ people who abuse opioids, they are also more dramatically affected by the consequences of employees with opioid addiction. Healthcare costs, absenteeism, and turnover—all linked with opioid abuse — are a bigger problem for a small business’s budget and overall ability to function.

The Health Costs of Opioid Abuse are Large. On average, people with at-risk opioid use (recreational use and addiction) cost employers nearly twice as much in annual healthcare expenses as those without at-risk use.

Opioid Abuse Increases Absenteeism. On average, people with at-risk opioid use are absent three more days per year than other employees.

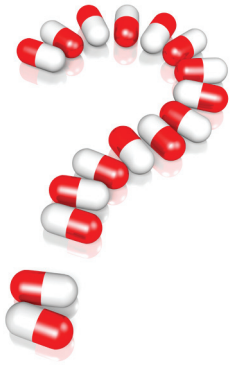
Opioid Abuse Leads to Turnover. People with addictions are more likely to have had three or more jobs in the past year than the general population.

People with Opioid Addictions Affect Their Coworkers. Other employees are more likely to quit if they work with a person who has an addiction.

“For small businesses, a bad hire represents a greater proportional cost for the organization than that of large enterprises, since every key employee has a huge impact on the business and its customers.” (Rachel Trindade, *Hire Right*)

Drug use is a growing concern for employers in the midst of a nationwide opioid epidemic that has hit Pennsylvania particularly hard.





Opioids and Your Workplace: A Guide for Small Businesses

(continued)

FAQs for Small Business Leaders

Q: **I trust my employees. Why should I create a drug-free workplace policy?**

A: Trust is an essential ingredient in working relationships. Fortunately, a drug-free workplace policy can help maintain your trust in your employees and help your employees trust you.

A drug free workplace policy allows you to obtain relevant information about employee substance use instead of relying on gossip and hunches. This promotes trust and fair treatment.

Just as important, a drug-free workplace policy helps your employees trust you. They know you won't turn a blind eye to a fellow employee whose substance use is creating a toxic work environment. And they know that your company is willing and able to help if addiction becomes a problem in their lives.

Q: **I'm concerned about the costs of an Employee Assistance Program.**

A: EAPs are not expensive. They cost \$12-40 per employee each year. Plus, you may save more than you spend. Many studies show that EAPs are cost-effective. For every \$1 invested in an EAP, employers can expect a return on investment of \$3-6.

Q: **We haven't had any problems with drugs. Why should I be concerned now?**

A: Overdose deaths have risen dramatically in Pennsylvania. We have 14 times the number of overdose deaths today as we did in 1979. This trend shows no signs of slowing down: there was a 23% increase in overdose deaths between 2014 and 2015.

That means there is a significant risk that your employees are now (or will be soon) struggling with addiction to painkillers or heroin. Risk is the likelihood of something going wrong, not about whether it's happened already.

Q: **How do I create a drug-free workplace policy?**

A: Visit Drug Free Workplace PA: <https://www.drugfreeworkplacepa.org/>
Read SAMHSA's Drug Free Workplace Toolkit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit>

Protect Your Investment

Small business owners care. In surveys, small business owners say they are motivated to do what they love and build something new. They place high priority on customers and relationships.

Small business ownership is risky. About half of small businesses keep their doors open for five years. About a third keep them open for ten.

Taking steps to address opioids in your workplace now could make all the difference in the future. Protect your employees, your customers, and your bottom line. Protect your dreams, your energy, and your time. Opioid addiction is a major problem in Pennsylvania, but tools are available to keep your employees safe and healthy.

Resources

SAMHSA Drug Free Workplace Toolkit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit>

Drug Free Workplace PA: <https://www.drugfreeworkplacepa.org/>