



**2.0 SUBSTANCE  
USE DISORDER:  
IMPACT IN THE  
WORKPLACE**

**THE RECOVERY FRIENDLY WORKPLACE TOOLKIT**

CT Department of Labor

CT Department of Public Health

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services





## THE COSTS OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD)

There is no question that supporting recovery from SUD is good for business.

There's also no question that businesses that allow SUD in the workplace to go undiscussed and untreated will continue to lose money, time, productivity, and employee morale.

To make the case for becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW), use the information in this section. Share it with supervisors and leadership. Let your colleagues see that supporting recovery is not just the wise, humane, healthy course of action.

**It's also beneficial to the bottom line.**



# 2.1



## LOOKING AT ALL SIDES OF THE ISSUE

### The economic impacts

NOTE: The information in this section is sourced from: National Institutes of Health (2017, 2018), The Minnesota RFW Program (2020), National Safety Council (2018, 2020), and SAMHSA (2004-2020).

### A Substance Use Calculator for Employers:

The National Safety Council has developed a Substance Use Cost Calculator for Employers.

To use the calculator, click here. <https://www.nsc.org/forms/substance-use-employer-calculator>



### THE DOWNSIDE



Big picture: SUD equates to

**\$400 billion a year in healthcare costs.**

**75%**

**of adults with untreated SUD are part of the US workforce**

– and they miss around 50% more work days than their fellow employees.

- Heavy drinking alone is estimated to cost \$82 billion each year in lost productivity.
- People who misuse alcohol are 270% more likely to have an accident.
- **Opioid misuse has impacted 70% of employers.**



### THE UPSIDE

- Each dollar spent on treatment and early intervention saves \$4 in healthcare costs and \$7 in law enforcement and criminal justice costs.
- Workers who get treatment for SUD save an average of \$3200 for their employers annually.
- Employees in recovery save around \$500 each year in health plan usage costs compared to those with untreated SUD.
- Employees who stay committed to recovery tend to stay as committed to their employer as their peers.
- Employees in recovery miss 5 days fewer each year than those not in recovery.

### THE HUMAN COST

- Many of us have seen and know firsthand the human toll SUD can take. Motor vehicle crashes, legal trouble, domestic abuse, workplace accidents, health problems, and economic hardship are just a few of the symptoms.



- **Only 10% of people** with SUD are getting treatment for the condition – despite the fact that recovery is possible.

**10% TREATED**

**90% UNTREATED**

- Nationally there are **22+ million people in recovery** – slowly succeeding in creating healthier homes, lives, and workplaces.

**22+** million people in recovery 

## THE SOCIAL STRAIN

- Family instability is perhaps the most critical social cost of SUDs. Families often experience significant tension and conflict when an adult with SUD remains untreated, and the impact reverberates in the workplace.
- Other social effects include disability, mental health conditions, homelessness, incarceration, crime, and suicide.
- Last of all, people with untreated SUD tend to become isolated, depressed, and unable to reclaim their identity as a family member, friend, and coworker.



# 2.2



## HANDLING SUD IN THE WORKPLACE

**80%** Human Resources (HR) Decision-Makers

believe that substance use disorder impacts their employees

**yet only 25%**

feel prepared to deal with the issue.



### SIGNS OF SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH SUD

- **Absenteeism.** This is among the leading indicators of SUD – especially increased absenteeism and increased used of sick time and vacation time.
- **Job disappearance.** Frequent or unexplained absence from work.
- **Job performance.** Unusually poor or inconsistent job performance.
- **Accidents and near-accidents.** Either on the job or at home.
- **Concentration.** Difficulty in focusing, or inability to focus at all.
- **Judgment.** Look out for an increase in poor decision-making and on-the-job errors.

- **Appearance.** A downturn in physical appearance and personal hygiene.

## HOW TO TALK TO AN EMPLOYEE ABOUT SUD: DO'S AND DON'TS:



If you had an SUD, chances are good you'd be very sensitive to being confronted with it, especially in the workplace. Caution and care are highly advised. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

- **DO have the conversation privately.** This reduces the chance that the employee will feel either 1. Threatened or 2. Acutely self-conscious. Your goal is not to get the employee to admit there's a problem, but if there is one, he or she is more likely to be open about it behind closed doors. If this happens, be ready with next steps and options. Be prepared to talk about being a Recovery Friendly Workplace.
- **DO use performance reviews as a place to start** - especially if there are performance-related issues to bring up. But don't wait for an annual review if you feel there's a problem that needs to be addressed now. Set a meeting and document the results.





- **DO ask questions rather than make accusations.** Minnesota's RFW program offers this approach to an employee with a possible SUD: "I've noticed you missed quite a few deadlines and days of work. Your performance has declined and it seems you have trouble concentrating. Is everything ok? Is there anything I can help with?" This line of inquiry opens a door for the employee to step through, if he or she is ready.
- **DO expect denial.** Those in the grasp of an SUD will often refuse to acknowledge a problem. If this is the case, move on with procedures you have for poor performance or behavior. Set expectations clearly according to existing policies. Document your encounter.
- **DO stick to facts.** Remember – all your actions need to be based on facts: performance, actions, and policies. Suspicion is not enough.
- **DON'T ignore the signs or the situation.** An employee with SUD is not going to suddenly get better. Dealing with it professionally and compassionately is the correct course of action.
- **DON'T approach an employee** unless you have legitimate, reasonable, documented instances where you feel there was evidence of SUD-related behavior.
- **DON'T be aggressive.** You might be aggravated or upset by the employee's behavior, but refrain from being abrupt, loud, accusatory, or confrontational.
- **DON'T make snap judgments.** Keep an open mind about how you can help the employee and how a positive outcome can be achieved.



# 2.3



## DIFFERENT PATHS FORWARD

**There is no single road to recovery. Once an employee has acknowledged that a substance use disorder (SUD) exists, here are the main options to consider.**



- **Create a plan for returning to work.** Following the initiation of treatment for the SUD, it's often wise to sit down and chart a return to work. This encourages ongoing engagement with treatment as a means of keeping the position.

- **Employee Assistance Program.** If you have an EAP, the employee can be directed to its resources for treatment, recovery, and peer support.
- **Non-EAP treatment.** If no EAP exists, the employee can review insurance-funded options as possible courses of action. Private and group insurance policy provision for SUD must be examined. The Affordable Care Act does require Medicaid and all insurance plans sold on the Health Insurance Exchange to provide services for SUD treatment.
- **Self-initiated treatment.** As the employer, you can direct the employee to the resources included as part of this toolkit, and make sure the employee understands that he or she has your support in pursuing recovery.

