

Employer Toolkit for Opioid Misuse and Abuse



LANCASTER COUNTY
**JOINING
FORCES**

*Coordinating efforts to reduce
deaths from opioids and heroin*

www.lancasterjoiningforces.org

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INTRODUCTION

According to the National Safety Council, companies of all sizes have an important role promoting the safety of employees and managing risks in the workplace. Employers who have strong workplace policies, education, health benefits programs and well-trained managers create safe and healthy environments in which both employees and businesses thrive.

Opioids in the workplace: A call to action

- Partner with insurance Medical/Pharmacy Benefit Manager and Employee Assistance Program providers
- Re-evaluate policy and listing for prescription drugs
- Invest in management and employee education
- Increase and ensure confidential access to help and treatment

Included in the workplace toolkit are the following:

- SAMHSA toolkit – Drug Free Toolkit
- PAMHSA.org Workplace Toolkit
- Local resources

ABOUT LANCASTER COUNTY JOINING FORCES



Lancaster County Joining Forces: www.lancasterjoiningforces.org is coordinating efforts to reduce deaths from opioid and heroin. In doing so, we strengthen the great work already happening in the communities throughout the county, while allowing us to identify gaps in services and treatments so that we can save lives together. The goal is to focus on evidence-based practices outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to reduce exposure to opioids, prevent misuse, and treat opioid use disorder.

Painkiller misuse and abuse has been a high priority for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in recent years. And with opioid abuse costing U.S. businesses close to \$26 billion a year, health plan sponsors are taking note. Lost work and productivity alone accounts for \$10 billion.

Consider that:

- 13% of the population with opioid prescription abuse are responsible for 92% of employer's costs.
- 7% of the population with two or more opioid prescriptions accounted for more than 80% of the cost burden to employers.

"Prescription drug abuse can often masquerade as other problems," cautions Michael Rogers, CEO of iFocus: Human Capital Solutions, a consulting firm. He advises employers to encourage all workers to take advantage of the employee assistance programs. "Don't make assumptions, don't assume they [employees] have a problem," he notes, "but be sure to point to the programs where they can get the support and treatments they need."

To address opioid misuse/abuse, employers must use a multipronged approach. For example, employers need to educate employees on the risks of opioid drug use to avoid misuse in the first place, and increase understanding about proper disposal of unused medications. Education should include information about options available for medication disposal such as "take back" programs.

Other suggestions include:

- Insisting on conservative prescribing guidelines for participating providers in all health programs;
- Know who is at risk in the company's specific population, using HIPAA-compliant technology and targeting those individuals;
- Increase and ensure confidential access to treatment.

"Opioid misuse costs employers in multiple ways, including more medical costs and productivity loss," says Jeff O'Mara, CEO of Healthentic. "Employers have a unique opportunity to help people get more productivity for less money by identifying and engaging the people at risk."

TAKING ACTION: ASSESS YOUR NEEDS

Consider these questions as you assess your workplace needs:

- Is yours a large organization employing individuals in safety- and security-sensitive industries?
- Does your organization conduct federally funded projects?
- Is your organization in the transportation sector, with mandated drug-testing requirements under regulations from the Department of Transportation?
- Does your organization have a high prevalence of substance use problems?
- Does your organization employ a population of workers for whom prevention education is critical?

A drug-free workplace policy and program are required for organizations with federally funded projects. At minimum, a written policy, supervisor training, and employee education must be in place. If your organization is in a sector with mandated drug-testing requirements, such as in safety- and security sensitive industries your policy and program must follow the requirements for testing.

As an employer, you should understand the nature of your workforce, the major problems and stressors that are affecting your employees, and the possible ways in which alcohol, prescription drugs, and other drug misuse may be causing or contributing to some of those problems. Armed with this understanding, you will be better able to put into place a drug-free workplace policy and program that fits the needs of your workplace and employees. Research by M. Bernstein and J.J. Mahony on occupational safety suggests that on-the-job drug use can lead to increased accidents and injuries. Michael R. Frone reported similar findings on work injuries. Frone's research also suggests that substance use can lead to lower levels of productivity and employee morale, not only for those with substance use problems but also for those working alongside them, according to a study on work stress and alcohol use.

Substance use behaviors can be beyond the employee's control, especially if the employee develops a substance use disorder. Preventing substance misuse in the first place and addressing it when it does occur is critical not only for workplace health and safety, but for reducing security risks and other possible negative impacts.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

When doing a needs assessment, you should involve all major segments of your workforce. No one person will understand what is happening throughout the workplace unless the workplace is very small. Make sure the members of the drug-free workplace team are representative of your employees, reflecting their racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity. Employees will be better able to cooperate in improving the workplace if they are brought into the process early. Many successful workplaces have found that cooperation, collaboration, and shared responsibility are the cornerstones of a successful drug-free workplace policy and program.

In addition, if you suspect that significant alcohol, prescription drug, or other substance misuse issues are costing the organization money in lost productivity, absenteeism, or damaged products, you might opt to bring in an outside expert. A professional can help you design a formal study that is tailored to the particular circumstances and needs of your workplace.

Taking enough time to understand the situation thoroughly will help you target your efforts and resources where you need them most.

Although an outside expert's formal assessment may be the gold standard, a drug-free workplace needs assessment does not have to be elaborate or costly to be effective. For workplaces with limited resources, you can encourage employees to explore how you can all work together to improve the health, safety, productivity, and quality of life in the workplace. By concentrating on a set of goals that are broader than just "the reduction or elimination of drug misuse in the workplace," you may be able to get more cooperation for actions that will support a drug-free workplace. However, if the problems appear significant and are causing a substantial impact on your organization, you may decide to invest resources into a more definitive assessment.

ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

Use both **quantitative** and **qualitative** techniques for a fuller understanding of how substance misuse might be impacting your workplace. Taking steps to gather quantitative and qualitative information from the very beginning of your drug-free workplace planning will help you identify the issues relevant to your workplace. It will also help you evaluate any activities you have undertaken to address those issues.

Quantitative approaches generally rely on survey questionnaires, administrative data, and statistical analyses. **Qualitative** approaches use observations, in-depth interviews, and focus groups to identify and contextualize human behavior.

ASSESSMENT CYCLES

Assessment should be part of an ongoing process to support your drug-free workplace program. You can develop an assessment cycle as follows:

1. Articulate the goals of the drug-free workplace policy and program and develop a set of objectives that should lead to the accomplishment of those goals. The goals may be as simple as responding to the legal requirements.
2. Design strategies that will accomplish the objectives with the resources available.
3. Determine the kinds of activities and accomplishments for which you will be evaluating change. Select assessment methods that can measure your workplace's progress toward achieving your objectives and goals. Measure not only the outcomes, but also the processes that contribute to those outcomes.
4. Gather assessment data, and summarize and interpret the results.
5. Use the results of the assessment to continually improve processes and outcomes.
6. As appropriate, revise your goals and objectives, review and revise your strategies and approaches, continue to gather qualitative and quantitative data, and assess how you are doing.

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