

A New Approach to Addiction in the Workplace

The Challenge

An estimated 21.7 million adults sought substance abuse treatment in 2015, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health. Many of those adults were workers struggling to maintain their employment status and livelihoods as a functional part of the workforce. Data from the National Safety Council reveal that, while 70% of employers report being impacted by prescription drug misuse, and just as many feel strongly about helping their employees return to work after substance abuse treatment, approximately 80% of employers lack a comprehensive drug-free workplace policy, and a similar percentage lack training on identifying substance abuse in their workplaces.

The Response

Substance use/abuse in the workplace costs Connecticut employers millions of dollars per year in lost productivity and days away from work, increased healthcare costs, human resources activities, and other resource expenditures. In addition, helping an employee or coworker maintain their work status in the face of substance abuse can increase workplace stress and severely impact morale. On March 1, 2017, the Connecticut Department of Public Health convened a symposium, *The Opioid Crisis and Connecticut's Workforce*, to educate employers about the development of opioid and other substance abuse issues, the current state of the opioid crisis in Connecticut, and treatment options and strategies for workers struggling with addiction. A second symposium, intended to build on the topics discussed at the previous meeting, was held on October 4, 2017. This discussion focused on the roles of employers, employees, insurers, and healthcare providers in the recognition, treatment, and recovery of workers suffering from addiction. More specifically, the Connecticut Department of Public Health sought to assist symposium attendees with developing a new set of best-practices for identifying workers engaged in or at risk for substance abuse, encouraging workers who need counseling or treatment to seek it, and providing the resources and support necessary to help employees overcome their illness and return to the vital role they play in the workplace.

The Impact

This white paper is the culmination of over a year's worth of work by a group of professionals representing public and private employers, worker unions and their constituents, physical and mental healthcare providers, legal services, insurers, academic researchers, and state agencies. Though their professional credentials and scope of daily work is highly diverse, these dedicated professionals have a common interest in saving the lives and livelihoods of the workers and families in our state who are impacted by the tragedy of opioids and substance abuse. The distribution of this white paper to employers and stakeholders is ongoing.

For more information about "The Opioid Crisis and Connecticut's workforce" please visit our website:

<http://www.ct.gov/dph/occupationalhealth>