

## ABSTRACT

Regulatory and societal barriers to effective treatment and prevention of substance use disorder (SUD) continue to fuel increases in overdose morbidity and mortality. Improved access to recovery supports, to include employment, is key to curbing the overdose epidemic and rebuilding stronger communities. People in recovery who are employed have lower rates of return to use, engage in less criminal activity, have fewer parole violations, have more improvements in quality of life, and experience more successful outcomes following treatment. Presenters will outline the role Recovery Ready Workplaces can play in reducing overdoses and helping individuals sustain recovery from SUD, as well as in strengthening communities. Recovery Ready Workplaces include policies and practices that expand employment opportunities for people in or seeking recovery; information for employees in recovery regarding their rights to reasonable accommodations and other protections; strategies to reduce the risk of SUD, including through education and preventing injury in the workplace; facilitation of help-seeking among employees with SUD; and ensuring access to services such as treatment, recovery support, and mutual aid.

## Supporting and accelerating Recovery Ready Workplaces are key policy tools for strengthening communities, businesses, and the economy

Recovery Ready Workplaces are characterized by the following elements: policies and practices that expand employment opportunities for people in or seeking recovery; information for employees in recovery regarding their rights to reasonable accommodations and other protections; strategies to reduce the risk of SUD, including through education and preventing injury in the workplace; facilitation of help-seeking among employees with SUD; and ensuring access to services such as treatment, recovery support, and mutual aid. Ensuring that a workplace is Recovery Ready helps individual workers and employers by improving worker productivity and employee retention.



## General strategies and approaches to advance Recovery Ready Workplaces

- **Ensuring the ADA aligns with the science and evidence of addiction and recovery.** The ADA distinguishes between illegal drug use and alcohol use, even though they are both categorized under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual 5 as an SUD. This presents a challenge for an individual who may be in recovery from an SUD but has “relapsed” or returned to use, a common part of the recovery process, even if they then reengage in treatment and recovery. This issue could be addressed through a statutory change from Congress aligning the protections of the ADA related to SUD with protections afforded to individuals with all other disabilities, or with protections for individuals with alcohol use disorder. Alternatively, the US Department of Justice could issue guidance to provide further clarification regarding the circumstances in which an individual in recovery is protected under the ADA if they have returned to use.
- **Employer tax credits.** Employer tax credits facilitate the hiring and onboarding of people with SUD and those in recovery as well as help employers meet the needs of current employees with an SUD. States can also incentivize hiring by offering state level tax credits. States and the federal government should evaluate the uptake and impact of existing incentives and modify and expand the programs accordingly.
- **Robust benefits for employees.** Poverty and unemployment threaten family stability and are associated with the development of parental SUD and increased risk for opioid overdose mortality. Poverty can also contribute to problematic substance use among youth, even in the absence of parental SUD. Given this association with overdose and SUD, paid time off, tax credits, health insurance benefits, and flexible and consistent work schedules all contribute to strengthening family financial stability.

## Specific policy recommendations to accelerate adoption of Recovery Ready Workplaces

- **Establish a commission to examine the ADA in light of the evolving science of addiction.** The current framework in the ADA around current use of drugs does not recognize what we now know that SUD is a chronic condition, and some people may return to use as a part of their recovery process.
- **Identify opportunities to create or expand tax incentives and grants for Recovery Ready Workplaces.** To support both employers and employees, Congress should consider expanding tax incentives and grant programs.
- **The Federal Government should be a model Recovery Ready Workplace.** The US Government, as an employer of more than 2.1 million civilians, can set an example for employers nationwide, both large and small.
- **Require commercial insurance and Medicaid to cover employment supports and ensure vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs incorporate benefits for people with SUD.**
- **Incentivize and expand Recovery Ready Workplaces.** States should incentivize the development through a range of funding and other resources for stakeholders, such as employer education, evaluation strategies, requirements, expectations, challenges, and opportunities for growth.

## Current protections for workers with SUD and existing models for Recovery Ready Workplaces

- The ADA provides meaningful protections for workers in recovery, including reasonable accommodations to sustain treatment and recovery supports.
- A Recovery Ready Workplace will, at a minimum, work with employees in recovery to accommodate their schedules and obligations in accordance with the ADA's reasonable accommodations requirements. Such employers may also offer additional resources, such as recovery coaches, which can help an individual in recovery develop their personal and professional skills such as time management, budgeting, and other soft skills.
- New Hampshire was one of the first states in the US to develop an initiative that later came to be known as the “Recovery Friendly” Workplace Initiative. This initiative promotes individual wellness by empowering workplaces to support employees in recovery.
- Massachusetts has implemented a similar program. While Massachusetts provides a list of steps that Recovery Ready Workplaces may take, this program emphasizes that any employer can take these steps immediately to support employees in recovery.
- Legislation passed in 2018, Indiana's State Health Improvement Plan and Grant Program, provides employers with tools and incentives to implement a second-chance system and protocols for candidates offered employment, but who test positive in a pre-employment alcohol or drug test, as well as current employees who test positive on an alcohol or drug test.



Center for Workplace Mental Health. “Substance Use Disorder Calculator.” American Psychiatric Association Foundation. Accessed December 18, 2019

## CONCLUSION

Recovery Ready Workplaces are a key strategy for governments and employers to support people in recovery, strengthen communities, and bolster the economy. Supporting people in obtaining and maintaining employment is a central part of a comprehensive approach to addressing SUD that incorporates all social determinants of health and a holistic approach to well-being.

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