

People who have completed treatment programs for drug or alcohol addiction are said to be in recovery. Like other chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes or high blood pressure, addiction to drugs or alcohol is a treatable and manageable condition. Just as people with diabetes or asthma need support and follow-up care to help prevent relapse and manage their illness, so do people recovering from substance use disorders.¹

DID YOU KNOW?

The Americans with Disabilities Act protects an individual with a disability from being discriminated against because of his or her condition. Workers who are in recovery from a substance use disorder (although *not* those who are actively using) are covered under the Act in most circumstances.²

FAST FACTS

- ◆ Replacing an employee costs from 25 percent to almost 200 percent of annual compensation—not to mention the loss of institutional knowledge, service continuity, and coworker productivity and morale that can accompany employee turnover.³
- ◆ 76 percent of people with drug or alcohol problems are employed.⁴ Firing these workers won't make the problem go away.
- ◆ Savings from investing in substance abuse treatment can exceed costs by a 12 to 1 ratio.⁵

By implementing policies and programs that support workers in recovery, employers can protect their investment in an employee's treatment and help employees recovering from drug or alcohol problems resume their productivity and contributions to the company.⁶

What Employers Can Do

In seeking treatment for a drug or alcohol problem, employees must overcome a number of risks and barriers,

including stigmatization, fear of losing their jobs and strained relationships with family members and coworkers. Returning to work after treatment has ended and recovery has begun brings many of the same challenges.

Employers can take many steps to help employees who are in recovery, such as:

- ◆ Providing flexible hours for employees, which allows people in recovery to attend treatment-related meetings, support groups and counseling sessions.
- ◆ Respecting employees' confidentiality. Employers may not know who among their workforce is in recovery, but if they do, they must recognize and appreciate the delicate balance between wanting to help and respecting an employee's need and desire for privacy.
- ◆ Offering affordable health insurance benefits that provide comprehensive coverage for substance use disorders, including aftercare and counseling.
- ◆ Ensuring that company wellness programs or Employee Assistance Programs* provide education, screening, and follow-up services for workers' drug and alcohol problems.

EAPs Can Support Employee Recovery

Employees who receive any kind of treatment for a drug or alcohol problem often require careful monitoring both during and after treatment to help them maintain sobriety. An EAP can:

- ◆ Help employees in recovery establish individualized plans to monitor progress and meet recovery goals,⁷
- ◆ Consolidate gains in workers' health and productivity that were achieved through treatment,⁸



- ◆ Help reduce disability claims that are related to drug and alcohol problems, and
- ◆ Help improve interpersonal and family relationships affected by a worker's substance use disorder.⁹

Confidential EAP follow-up has two main goals:

1. To help employees maintain work continuity during treatment (many employees remain on the job while they receive counseling on an outpatient basis) and afterwards; and
2. To ensure that an employee adheres to the continuing-care component of his or her treatment plan and to provide continued monitoring if the employee fails to comply with company policies (such as testing positive for drugs).

***Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs)** are designed to help identify and resolve productivity problems affecting employees who are impaired by personal concerns. EAPs come in many different forms, from telephone-based services to on-site programs. Face-to-face programs provide more comprehensive services for employees with substance use disorders, including screening, treatment referrals and follow-up care.

For More Information

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, www.samhsa.gov
- Employee Assistance Professionals Association, www.eapassn.org
- Drug-Free Workplace Program, <http://www.workplace.samhsa.gov/>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse, www.nida.nih.gov

References

- ¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse. (1999). *Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment: A Research-Based Guide*. Bethesda, MD: Author. <http://www.nida.nih.gov/podat/PODATIndex.html> . (Accessed 5-23-08).
- ² Americans with Disabilities Act. <http://www.eeoc.gov/types/ada.html> (Accessed 5-23-08).
- ³ F. Leigh Branham, "Six Truths about Employee Turnover," NY: American Management Association. <http://www.nichebenefits.com/Library/sixtruths.pdf> (Accessed 5-19-08).
- ⁴ SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2005 and 2006*: Table 5.8A. Rockville, MD, 2007. <http://oas.samhsa.gov/nsduh/2k6nsduh/tabs/Sect5peTabs1to13.pdf> . (Accessed 5-7-08).
- ⁵ National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Op.cit.*
- ⁶ P.M. Roman and T.C. Blum, "The Workplace and Alcohol Problem Prevention," *Alcohol Research and Health*, 26, no.1 (2002): 49-57. <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh26-1/49-57.htm> . (Accessed 5-14-08).
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Hon, Jeffrey, *Employee Assistance Programs: Workplace Opportunities for Intervening in Alcohol Problems*. 2003. Ensuring Solutions to Alcohol Problems, The George Washington University Medical Center. Washington, DC. http://www.ensuringsolutions.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=335841&cat_id=988 (Accessed 5-23-08).
- ⁹ Prochaska, Shelley, 2003. Employee Assistance Programs: What Does HR Need to Know? Society for Human Resource Management, Alexandria, VA. Available (with membership): http://www.shrm.org/hrresources/whitepapers/published/CMS_004450.asp (Accessed 5/30/07).

