



The Massachusetts Recovery Ready Workplace Program

**EMPLOYEE FREQUENTLY
ASKED QUESTIONS**



Contents

Frequently Asked Questions about Recovery Ready Workplaces	1
Q. What is a Recovery Ready Workplace?.....	2
Q. Why Does this Matter to my Employer?.....	2
Q. Do We Really Need a Whole Initiative Just for People in Recovery?	3
Q. Is “In Recovery” Just Another Way to Say Someone Quit Drugs or Alcohol?.....	4
Q. I Am Struggling with Drugs or Alcohol, and I am Afraid I Will Lose My Job. What Should I Do?.....	5
Q. I Am a Person in Recovery. What Should I Do if I Am Invited to a Work Event That Might Include Alcohol or Drugs?.....	5
Q. People Are Asking Me About my Addiction and Recovery. What Should I Say?.....	6
Q. I have a Substance Use Disorder. Are There Workplace Laws or Policies that Protect Me?.....	6
Citations	7

Frequently Asked Questions about *Recovery Ready Workplaces*

This set of FAQs was developed for employees of *Recovery Ready Workplaces* to understand the program and their employer's commitment to people in recovery. These FAQs are part of a package of resources that MassHire Holyoke Career Center developed to help local businesses **create a culture of support for employees on the journey of recovery from substance use and addictions.**

Q. What is a Recovery Ready Workplace?

Your employer is a Recovery Ready Workplace! Congratulations! But what does that mean? It means that your company has committed to create a culture of support for employees on the journey of recovery from substance use and addictions.

They are doing this by:

- Recognizing that addiction is a disease that can affect anyone, and choosing to respond supportively, much as they would with someone diagnosed with other medical conditions like heart disease or cancer.
- Connecting employees and supervisors to substance use and behavioral health information, resources, trainings, and services to meet their specific needs.
- Establishing HR policies and practices that help people in recovery (or dealing with family members in recovery) maintain their employment.

Recovery Ready Workplaces benefit from a healthier, more productive, and more motivated workforce. They gain a reputation among current and potential employees as a positive and supportive place to work. It feels good to work for a company that you know supports its employees in all aspects of their lives.

Q. Why Does this Matter to my Employer?

Addiction impacts nearly every workplace in some way. One in 12 U.S. workers are dealing with an untreated substance use disorder (SUD) like alcohol or opioid addiction. This is very costly for employers¹—workers with untreated SUDs miss around two weeks more of work each year than typical workers and are more likely to get hurt at work or leave their job. Alcohol misuse alone is responsible for \$74 billion per year in lost work productivity in the U.S.

By acknowledging and openly addressing the topic of addiction, your employer is creating a safe environment for people with SUDs to get help for their addiction without the fear of discrimination and they are showing people in recovery that they are valued and supported. Employers who actively support recovery, through a Recovery Ready Workplace program or another approach, experience:

- Increased employee retention and fewer absences. When people with SUD get treatment and recover, absenteeism decreases by 36% and work turnover decreases by 13%.²
- Healthier and safer work environment. A Recovery Ready Workplace culture is focused on emotional and physical wellness and safety.

- Greater productivity and loyalty among staff. People in recovery have fewer missed workdays than even people who have never had an SUD.
- Lower health care costs. Each dollar spent on SUD treatment and early intervention saves \$4 in healthcare costs and \$7 in law enforcement and criminal justice costs.³
- Enhanced reputation as a supportive yet highly accountable organization. Nearly everyone knows someone impacted by addiction. Proactively addressing substance use and supporting recovery shows your community and your customers that you care.

Q. Do We Really Need a Whole Initiative Just for People in Recovery?

Yes, we really do. There are more than 22 million Americans who identify themselves as people in recovery. People who are trying to maintain their recovery must also deal with shame and stigma associated with having an addiction. Some people still view addiction as a moral weakness or character flaw despite evidence that it is a complex brain disorder that effects behavior.

Stigma means negative views or ideas about people. Stigma against people with addiction is common and harmful. It can lead to fear, discrimination, and negative thoughts about oneself. Many people with SUD never seek help because they are so afraid of the negative stigma associated with their illness.

There are three types of stigma:

- **Public stigma:** The general public has negative beliefs and attitudes about people with addictions that lead to fear, rejection, avoidance, and discrimination. For example, many people may think things like: ***“People with history of addiction are unmotivated and can’t be trusted.”***
- **Self-stigma:** Internal negative thoughts or beliefs can lead to decreased self-esteem, self-worth, and sense of belonging. People with a history of SUD may think: ***“I can’t hold down a good job because of my past mistakes.”***
- **Structural stigma:** Rules, policies, and practices can restrict rights and opportunities. For instance, a company may have a policy that states: ***“Company X does not hire people with past drug offences on their record.”***

Most people with addiction are just regular people and deserve the respect and empathy that you would give to any other person. You can help fight stigma by changing your attitude, offering positive support for people in recovery, and calling out stigma when you see it.

Work is one of the best predictors of positive outcomes for people in recovery from SUDs.⁴ People who work are more likely to reduce their substance use and better able to maintain recovery.

People who are employed experience:

- Lower rates of recurrence of their addiction
- Higher rates of abstinence from drugs and alcohol
- Less criminal activity
- More success in completing SUD treatment
- Improvements in quality of life

But it can be hard for people in recovery to get new jobs or to keep the jobs they have if their symptoms recur and they need to miss time at work to work on their recovery. This is why a Recovery Ready workplace initiative is so very important and necessary.

Q. Is “In Recovery” Just Another Way to Say Someone Quit Drugs or Alcohol?

Stopping the use of substances is only one part of living a life of recovery. Recovery is a process of change through which a person improves their health and wellness, lives a self-directed life, and strives to reach their full potential. There are many pathways to recovery. Some people take medication, some go to mutual support meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), some go to counseling or therapy, others try holistic treatments. Typically, these pathways are split into three main areas:

- Clinical pathways provided by professionals, such as prescriptions for medications, counseling, and inpatient, long-term residential, or outpatient care.
- Non-clinical pathways that are focused on meeting basic needs like health care, job training, transportation, and education, and other supports like AA, NA, and SMART Recovery or Recovery Support Centers.
- Natural recovery, which happens when symptoms of SUD go into remission without formal help, usually along with other improvements in behavioral, outlook, or identity.

A person’s recovery journey is as unique as they are. However, there are four important areas that support a life in recovery: health, home, purpose, and community.

- Health: overcoming or managing one’s diseases or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being.
- Home: having a stable and safe place to live.
- Purpose: conducting meaningful daily activities and having the independence, income, and resources to participate in society. (One prime example here is being employed.)
- Community: having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.⁵

Q. I Am Struggling with Drugs or Alcohol, and I am Afraid I Will Lose My Job. What Should I Do?

Because you work at a Recovery Ready Workplace, your employer likely has policies in place to support you in getting help for your substance use. These may include:

- An employee assistance program (EAP) or other program that you can call for counseling and referral to treatment.
- A designated recovery support person on staff. This person's name is probably posted on the breakroom or on the Intranet.
- A list of SUD treatment providers that your employer has a relationship with or recommends.
- Light duty, intermittent leave, or other policies that allow you to miss work in order to get treatment.

If none of these apply to you, or you don't feel comfortable with them, try any of the following resources:

- Massachusetts Substance Use Hotline at (800) 327-5050; helplineMA.org
- Massachusetts Crisis Line: 988
- SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Locator is an excellent tool for finding SUD treatment in your area: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Q. I Am a Person in Recovery. What Should I Do if I Am Invited to a Work Event That Might Include Alcohol or Drugs?

Be prepared! It can be challenging to be social and maintain sobriety. Because you work for a Recovery Ready Workplace, it is possible that most social events will be specifically designed to be alcohol- and drug-free. However, a dinner party or other event that includes food may also include alcoholic drinks. Plan ahead what non-alcoholic drinks you will order. Connect with other people at your workplace who also don't use substances and have fun! If you feel like attending the event would be a risk to your recovery, speak to your supervisor. At the first sign that you feel uncomfortable leave as soon as possible. You can touch base with the host or friends afterward.

Q. People Are Asking Me About my Addiction and Recovery. What Should I Say?

First, just because you work at a Recovery Ready Workplace does not mean that you are required to share your recovery story with your colleagues. If you want to talk about it, how much you disclose is totally up to you. Some people prefer to keep their responses short and to the point. “I needed to get help to get healthy. I am feeling so much better. Thanks for asking.” Or you may want to shout it from the rooftops! Speak to your supervisor or designated workplace recovery support person about how you might share your story to help spread the message of recovery.

Q. I have a Substance Use Disorder. Are There Workplace Laws or Policies that Protect Me?

SUD qualifies as a disability under federal law. This means that you are most likely protected from workplace discrimination by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA is a federal law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination. The standards are a little different if you have an alcohol use disorder or opioid or other drug use disorder. The ADA National Network has a detailed section on how the ADA applies to people with addiction: <https://adata.org/factsheet/ada-addiction-and-recovery>. You may also be protected from discrimination based on your SUD by the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act. You can learn more about the FEPA at <https://bit.ly/3uKXC3j>.

Depending on the size of your employer, the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) may also apply to you if you need to take leave for SUD treatment. FMLA entitles eligible employees of covered employers to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of group health insurance coverage under the same terms and conditions as if the employee had not taken leave. This includes 12 work weeks in a 12-month period for “a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job,” among other reasons. Addiction is a serious health condition. FMLA can be taken in a single block, in multiple smaller blocks, or on a “part-time basis.”⁶ See the FMLA Employee Guide at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/employee-guide>.

If you work for a Recovery Ready employer, count yourself as lucky! If you do not, maybe it's time for your company to TAKE THE PLEDGE to become one. Find out more at <https://masshireholyoke.org/the-recovery-ready-workplace/>.

Citations

- 1-3. National Safety Council (2021). [ncs.org](https://www.nsc.org)
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education. HHS Publication No. PEP21-PL-Guide-6 Rockville, MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2021.
5. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2020). **Recovery and Recovery Supports**. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>
6. U.S. Department of Labor. (2021). **FMLA**. <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/benefits-leave/fmla>

Learn more at: <https://massshireholyokeye.org/the-recovery-ready-workplace/>

This workforce product was 100% funded by a \$1,828,864 grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. The product was created by the recipient and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Department of Labor. The Department of Labor makes no guarantees, warranties, or assurances of any kind, express or implied, with respect to such information, including any information on linked sites and including, but not limited to, accuracy of the information or its completeness, timeliness, usefulness, adequacy, continued availability, or ownership. This product is copyrighted by the institution that created it.

