



## Massachusetts Recovery Ready Workplace Program

### EMPLOYER GUIDE



## About this Guide

This guide is part of a package of resources that MassHire Hampden County developed to help local businesses **create a culture of support for employees on the journey of recovery from substance use and addictions.**

Substance use disorders (SUDs), including opioid addiction and alcoholism, affect millions of Americans each year and millions more identify themselves as people in recovery from addiction. Close to 75% of people with SUDs are employed—that's **more than 15 million working adults in the U.S. who are currently living with addiction or have in the past.**

This ***Recovery Ready Workplace*** Guide gives businesses the information and resources they need to support their staff who are either in recovery from addiction, struggling with family members with addiction, or want to learn more about recovery ready HR policies, recovery-oriented practices, and employee education.

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# Why Employers Need to Care About Recovery

## Addiction is a public health crisis.

- There were more than 80,000 deaths attributed to overdose from June 2019 through May 2020.<sup>1</sup>
- Each year addiction costs U.S. employers billions of dollars from factors such as work absences, lost productivity, medical costs, early retirement, and death.<sup>2</sup>
- Massachusetts is highly impacted by substance use. Rates of excessive drinking and cannabis (marijuana) use are higher in Mass than the national average.<sup>3</sup>

## Addiction impacts nearly every workplace in some way.

- 1 in 12 U.S. workers are dealing with an untreated SUD.
- In a National Safety Council (NSC) survey, 86% of employers were concerned that prescription opioid use was having a negative impact on their workplace and 74% felt the same about heroin and fentanyl.
- Over 75% of employers have been affected in some way by employee drug use, with 38% experiencing impacts related to absenteeism or impaired worker performance.
- Only 17% of employers believe their organization is extremely well prepared to deal with addiction in the workplace.<sup>4</sup>

## Untreated SUD is costly for employers.<sup>5</sup>

- Workers with untreated SUDs miss around two weeks more of work each year than typical workers. On the other hand, those in recovery from SUD miss the fewest days of any group.
- Those with an SUD are 40% more likely to report more than one employer over the past year than typical employees. Supporting and retaining these employees saves businesses money. Job turnover and retraining costs roughly 50% of an employee's annual salary.
- Alcohol use alone is responsible for \$74 billion per year in lost work productivity in the U.S.

## Supporting people in recovery is good for business!

Acknowledging and openly addressing the topic of addiction and creating an environment that supports people in establishing and maintaining their recovery is beneficial for employers. 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%.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.<sup>7</sup>
- 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.

## Work is one of the best predictors of positive outcomes for people in recovery from SUDs.<sup>8</sup>

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

**People who work are more likely to reduce their substance use and are better able to maintain recovery.**

# The Recovery Ready Workplace

## What is a Recovery Ready Workplace ?



**ACKNOWLEDGES** and openly addresses the topic of drug and alcohol misuse



**EDUCATES** employees and customers about the disease of addiction and treatment resources and options



**OFFERS** HR policies and practices to support employees who are in recovery from addiction

### You can make your workplace Recovery Ready by:

- Recognizing that addiction is a disease that can affect your valued employees and by choosing to respond supportively, much as you would with someone diagnosed with other medical conditions like heart disease or cancer.
- Connecting employees and supervisors to SUD and behavioral health information, resources, trainings, and services to meet their specific needs.
- Establishing HR policies and practices that help people in recovery maintain their employment.

**Recovery Ready businesses 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.**

### How Do You Start?

There are many ways you can make your workplace “recovery ready.” And you don’t need to do them all at once! This guide is full of ideas for how you can show employees that you support people in recovery. Try any or all of them!

# How to Create a Culture of Recovery

A culture of recovery is one that encourages health and wellness and provides support and non-judgmental openness to all aspects of employees' lives. A culture of recovery prioritizes physical and mental health and safety. You can create a culture of recovery through any of the following actions:

- 1. Communicate** and act to reduce stigma in the workplace. Fear of judgement, punishment, and misunderstanding leads many people in recovery to feel shame and embarrassment about their past SUD. You can communicate through your words, actions, and policies that you support people in recovery and that stigmatizing language and behavior about addiction are unacceptable in your workplace. Learn more about stigma at [Shatterproof.org](https://shatterproof.org).
- 2. Talk** about recovery as a strength and a point of pride. Recovering from addiction is hard and admirable work! Encourage your leadership and staff in recovery to share their stories. Shift people's perspective from one of shame about addiction to one of pride about recovery. Celebrate recovery whenever you hear about it.
- 3. Encourage** employees to discuss concerns and provide referrals to appropriate services including Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if available. Consider an informal or formal "open door" policy that states that employees can come to their managers, HR, or a designated recovery coach for help with addiction without the fear of punishment and for connection to appropriate services. This can be done through an EAP and/or relationships with local service providers. Learn more about referrals and EAPs from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](https://www.samhsa.gov).
- 4. Plan** company events that are free of alcohol, marijuana, and illicit substances. Work-related social events can be incredibly stressful for people in recovery. Make sure that your team-building and social events are not focused on providing alcohol. A group hike, outdoor games, or problem-solving task like an escape room beat a brewery tour, wine-tasting, or group mixer for making your employees in recovery feel supported. If you are hosting an event that may involve alcohol or marijuana, tell your employees ahead of time and don't require them to attend. A quick Google search for ideas for alcohol-free work events produces thousands of results.
- 5. Support** a culture of health wellness for all employees. Recovery is maintained as part of a healthy lifestyle. Make your workplace one that encourages employee health and wellness through things like gym membership reimbursement, company-based sports clubs (e.g., softball, running club), or volunteer groups at fundraising races and other events, for instance. Consider a "lunch break walking

group,” after-hours yoga on-site, or other healthy activities your employees can participate in. Check out the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Workplace Health Resource Center for ideas on [engaging employees in their health and wellness](#).

- 6. Train** supervisors to identify warning signs of recurrence and to help communicate with employees to support their recovery. There are some clear warning signs that one of your employees may be using drugs or alcohol. The National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) offers a useful list of signs of intoxication to watch for at work (see page 9): <https://bit.ly/3oIXBkd>



# Resources and Tools to Show Your Staff That You Support Recovery

There are many free materials available online that you can download or link to show your staff that you support recovery. See the following resources for handouts, breakroom posters, presentations, and videos to open the lines of communication about substance misuse with your staff.

## Education and Training (Employer-focused)

- National Safety Council, Opioids in the Workplace Toolkit: <https://bit.ly/3fbc1iD>
- National Safety Council, Cannabis: It's Complicated. Marijuana 101 fact sheet: <https://bit.ly/2RNJFDj>
- National Safety Council,
- Shatterproof, Just Five workplace training videos to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and share information about addiction: <https://justfive.org/>
- Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston Medical Center, Employer Resource Library: <https://www.bmc.org/addiction/employer-resource-library>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Opioids in the Workplace, Tools for Workplaces: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/opioids/resources.html>
- Massachusetts Recovery Ready Workplace page: <https://massshireholyokeye.org/the-recovery-ready-workplace/>

## Education and Training (Employee-focused)

- SAMHSA's Drug Free Workplace Program: [www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit/plan-implement-program/provide-training](http://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit/plan-implement-program/provide-training)
- Many local SUD service providers provide community education and may be willing to come to your workplace and provide an overview of SUD, treatment, or other topics for your staff.

## Referral to Treatment

You should have a ready list of reputable treatment providers to offer employees seeking support with their recovery.

- SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Locator is an excellent tool for finding SUD treatment in your area: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- Hampden County Crisis Text Line: 741-741

- Massachusetts crisis line: 988

## HR and Hiring Policies, Practices, and Benefits to Support Recovery

A Recovery Ready Workplace makes a concerted effort to support its employees' recovery journeys, through a variety of policies and practices. Consider any of these options for your Recovery Ready Workplace program.

### Flexible Leave of Absence, Part-Time, or Light Duty Policies

Do you have HR policies that require staff to meet strict standards to change or reduce their work hours? Consider creating more flexible leaves of absence for people who need residential or intensive outpatient SUD treatment and policies that allow staff to return part-time or with less intense work requirements.

**The benefits of flexible work arrangements are two-fold.**

1. Employees working on their recovery can feel that their jobs are secure even if they are unable to do their jobs at full capacity.
2. Employees who are sick or injured will not feel rushed back to full-duty work and feel the need to rely on prescription opioids to “get through the pain” of a day of work.

**Options to consider include:**

- Split shifts or other flexible arrangements so individuals can go to appointments, court appearances, or receive medication-assisted treatment (methadone, for instance, must be taken daily at a special clinic).
- Light duty work, such as paperwork, phone calls, ordering and inventory, or other less strenuous responsibilities for people recovering from injury or working on their recovery from SUD.
- Temporary part-time hours for those who need them.
- Generous family and medical leave policies (for those seeking recovery themselves or supporting a loved one through recovery).

### Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

If an EAP is not already part of your benefit package, consider including one. They are often a low-cost add-on to your medical plan. An EAP offers free, confidential counseling and referrals to employees. An EAP is often a low-barrier, convenient way for a struggling employee to get help.

- Encourage employees to use your EAP! Reassure them that it is entirely

confidential and protected by the same laws that protect their medical information. The national average for utilization of EAPs is only 3 percent.<sup>9</sup>

- Research shows that EAPs can return up to three times their cost in savings to employers through improvements in attendance, productivity, life satisfaction, life/work balance, and overall performance of staff.<sup>10</sup>

## Health Insurance and Other Health-Related Benefits

### **Make available health insurance policies that provide generous access to quality SUD treatment.**

- Work with insurance carriers to identify centers of excellence for addiction recovery. Offer and cover travel expenses for patients who go for treatment.
- Talk with insurance carriers and pharmacy benefit managers about designing plans to help prevent prescription drug addiction. Medicaid programs and some private payers use drug review programs to prevent “doctor shopping” or “pharmacy shopping” to reduce the risk of over-prescription of opioids. Talk to your benefit manager to learn more. You may consider introducing prescription monitoring programs if you do not already have them in place to ensure no worker is taking certain addictive medications for too long.
- Choose a health plan that offers comprehensive and generous coverage of SUD and mental health treatment. The Grayken Center for Addiction at Boston University has a free detailed benefits coverage questionnaire you can use to interview potential and current insurance carriers. Find it at: <https://www.bmc.org/sites/default/files/addiction/4-benefit-coverage-questionnaire.pdf>

## Return to Work Policies<sup>11</sup>

A return-to-work policy is focused on expectations and accountabilities for an employee who is returning to the workplace after a drug- or alcohol-related incident that affected their performance, safety, another job-related factor. Return to work policies are often an alternative to termination and are a way to show employees that you support them in their recovery. If you create a return to work policy, consider these recommendations from the [National Association of Homebuilders](#):

- Clearly describe your expectations for the returning employee and the conditions of their return, such as mandatory participation in their EAP or random drug testing.
- Require a fitness for duty certificate from a doctor or addiction treatment professional.
- Provide light duty or modified responsibilities.

- Offer “last chance agreement” contracts for people with repeat substance misuse-related work issues.

#### Use these resources to learn more:

- U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN), Last Chance Agreements for Employees with Drug and Alcohol Addictions: <https://bit.ly/3fKOISC>

## Stigma-free Hiring Standards

Research shows that employment is one of the main predictors of a person’s ability to maintain their recovery. However, people with drug- and alcohol-related criminal records can struggle to get hired because of their pasts.

Many Recovery Ready workplaces are open to hiring people with criminal backgrounds that are related to their SUD. You can let candidates know up front that a criminal record may not discount them from employment. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has some helpful tips on how to do this: <https://bit.ly/3fd4hwD>

## Legal Protections and Programs for People with SUD

### People with diagnosed substance use disorders are protected under several federal and state programs.

**Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA):** 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.”<sup>12</sup> See the FMLA Employer Guide at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/fmla/employer-guide>.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** People with diagnosed SUD may be protected from workplace discrimination by the ADA. 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>.

**The Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act (M.G.L. c. 151B)** protects individuals from discrimination based on disability (among other things). Learn more at <https://bit.ly/3uKXC3j>.

**Federal tax incentives for hiring people in recovery.** You may be eligible for a federal Work Opportunity Tax credit if you hire certain individuals in recovery, such as those with felony convictions, some veterans, and others. See the Department of Labor’s Work Opportunity Tax Credit fact sheet for more information: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/>

[eta/wotc](http://eta/wotc).

# Taking Your Recovery Ready Workplace Program to the Next Level

Once you have established your Recovery Ready Workplace program, consider some of these ideas to take it to the next level.

**Identify and provide training to an on-staff recovery support person.** This might be an individual at your company who has identified themselves as a person in recovery from drugs or alcohol. Fund their pursuit of recovery coach training or certification and allow them to support their colleagues on company time. (Learn more about the Certified Addictions Recovery Coach credential in Massachusetts: <https://www.mbsacc.com/carc>). You should post this person’s role and contact information somewhere that your employees can see it—for instance in a break room or on a company Intranet.

**Create an employee referral pipeline with a local SUD treatment provider.** People coming out of residential SUD treatment have often lost their jobs to their addiction. Work with a local residential or outpatient provider to prepare qualified individuals to apply to your organization.

**Reserve space for 12-step (AA/NA) or other mutual support groups on your property.** Do you have a conference room or other space that may be used for meetings? Offer it free of charge to your local chapter of AA, NA, SMART Recovery, or another group. If you are a large employer, you could even offer these meetings during business hours for your staff in recovery.

**Create a NARCAN (naloxone) training program.** NARCAN is a life-saving treatment to reverse an opioid overdose. NARCAN® is available over the counter and many workplaces now keep it on hand and train staff on its use. You can find a NARCAN kit at pharmacies all over Massachusetts. Visit [mass.gov/naloxone](https://mass.gov/naloxone) to learn more.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health has a fact sheet all about setting up a NARCAN program at your workplace: “[Using Naloxone to Reverse Opioid Overdose in the Workplace: Information for Employers and Workers.](#)” You can even partner with a community organization to offer community NARCAN training for your staff and customers. In Massachusetts contact HRIA <https://hria.org/> and they can provide training and NARCAN kits for your site.

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

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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.

