

# Mental Health and Substance Use at Work

## Employer Toolkit

Recovery Friendly



## Building a Recovery-Friendly Workplace

Recovery-friendly workplaces support their communities by recognizing recovery from mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) as a strength, and by being willing to work intentionally with people in recovery. These workplaces encourage a healthy and safe environment where employers, employees and communities can collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those affected mental health or substance use challenges.

### RECOVERY

Recovery begins when a person regains control over their mental health or SUD challenge and begins to live a healthy, productive life. It is important to remember that:

- Recovery is a personal journey. One person's recovery may differ dramatically from another's recovery.
- Relapse is often a natural part of recovery. Recovery from mental health or SUD may include making significant lifestyle changes that can be difficult to maintain. People may relapse one or more times before recovery becomes long-term.

One component of a successful recovery is gainful employment. Being employed offers the opportunity to make progress toward realization of goals, improved family, and social relationships, rebuilt financial stability, restoration of self-confidence, and a contribution to society among many other benefits.

### THE ROLE EMPLOYERS CAN PLAY

Employers play an important role in helping employees in recovery by embracing people with mental health and SUDs. Doing so prevents feelings of stigma and isolation, and greatly improves employees' chances of recovery. A supportive workplace environment can also help prevent relapse.

Employees who are in recovery have equal or lower health care costs, absenteeism, and job turnover. Employers are likely to see a high return on investment when working with employees throughout treatment to achieve recovery. Supporting employees in recovery creates a culture of job satisfaction and loyalty in the workforce.

People in recovery often have a high degree of self-awareness, resilience, compassion, dedication and understanding. These skills and behaviors should be valued by employers due to the positive impacts the employee can have on team, company, and culture.

### HOW TO BUILD A RECOVERY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE

All components described in the toolkit support a recovery-friendly workplace. Having buy-in from leadership and employees alike, supportive policies and programs such as EAPs, return-to-work plans, support for employees who need treatment or leave, health care benefits that treat mental health and SUDs thoroughly and with the same resolve as physical illnesses, and training supervisors to recognize warning signs are all components that create a workplace culture of support and wellness. Tips to build a RFW:

- Openly talk about mental health and SUDs - remember to emphasize that recovery is possible and likely - always provide a message of hope.
- Pay attention to your language - using stigmatizing language decreases the likelihood that an employee will seek help when needed.
- Be supportive of others - providing support can help change someone's life.
- Know the facts - understanding mental health and SUDs reduces stigma and increases acceptance as a condition from which one can recover.

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- Celebrate recovery as a strength.
- When hiring, if the interviewee reveals a history of mental health or SUD and/or that they are in recovery, recognize that no differently than disclosure of other medical conditions.
- Have wellness programs that promote and support employee health, work/life balance and wellbeing; stressful conditions can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, including substance use or relapse.
- Despite best efforts, gossip can ensue when an employee has to leave employment for substance use related reason; prevent malicious gossip and ensure an exit with dignity if necessary.
- Do not provide alcohol at work events or provide a variety of non-alcoholic options.
- Encourage healthy after-hour activities in addition to or instead of happy hour.

### CONNECT WITH THE COMMUNITY

- Participate in recovery-focused community events.
- Establish a relationship with a local recovery community organization and initiatives as a resource for employees.

**Peer recovery support is characterized by the provision of non-clinical peer support, which can include activities that engage, educate, and support an individual as they make the necessary changes to recover from mental health or substance use disorder. Peer providers offer valuable guidance by sharing their own experiences in recovery by helping to build skills, assist with and address specific needs that someone with mental health or SUD is faced with. They work to improve social connectedness and help identify new positive social environments, including finding and maintaining employment.**

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- Every component of a Recovery Friendly Workplace program must:
  - Be developed in partnership with the organization's legal advisers
  - Safeguard employee confidentiality
  - Comply with federal, state, and local regulations, including but not limited to OSHA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Mental Health Parity Act and HIPAA
  - Comply with union and industry regulations

The Mental Health and Substance Use at Work Employer Toolkit has been developed to raise awareness with businesses about how to respond to the risks associated with mental health challenges and substance use disorder. The content is meant for educational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice or replacing the additional work needed to develop a responsible Recovery Friendly Workplace program. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for consultation with a legal professional, or other competent advisor.

Medical advice and information in this document were approved by The National Safety Council-NSC physicians who advise the Council on our substance use harm initiatives. These doctors are also members of the NSC Physician Speakers Bureau.

### NEED HELP?

If you have questions or need help finding materials, please contact [admin@huroncountymhas.org](mailto:admin@huroncountymhas.org).