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Recovery Friendly Workplaces:
A Safety Strategy for a Stronger Workforce

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Learning Objectives

- Describe characteristics and benefits of a recovery-friendly workplace (policies, programs, and practices)
- Identify resources and support available for Iowa employers seeking to implement recovery-friendly practices
- Discuss strategies for addressing stigma and discrimination related to substance use in the workplace

What is a recovery friendly workplace?

1. **Creating a healthy and safe workplace**
2. **Providing support for workers who are struggling**
3. **Finding opportunities for people in recovery to reenter or enter the workplace**

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What's in a name…

- ***Recovery Friendly Workplace -*** OSHA, Governors Programs
- ***Recovery Ready Workplace -*** Dept. of Labor
- ***Respond Ready Workplace -*** National Safety Council
- ***Workplace Supported Recovery -*** NIOSH

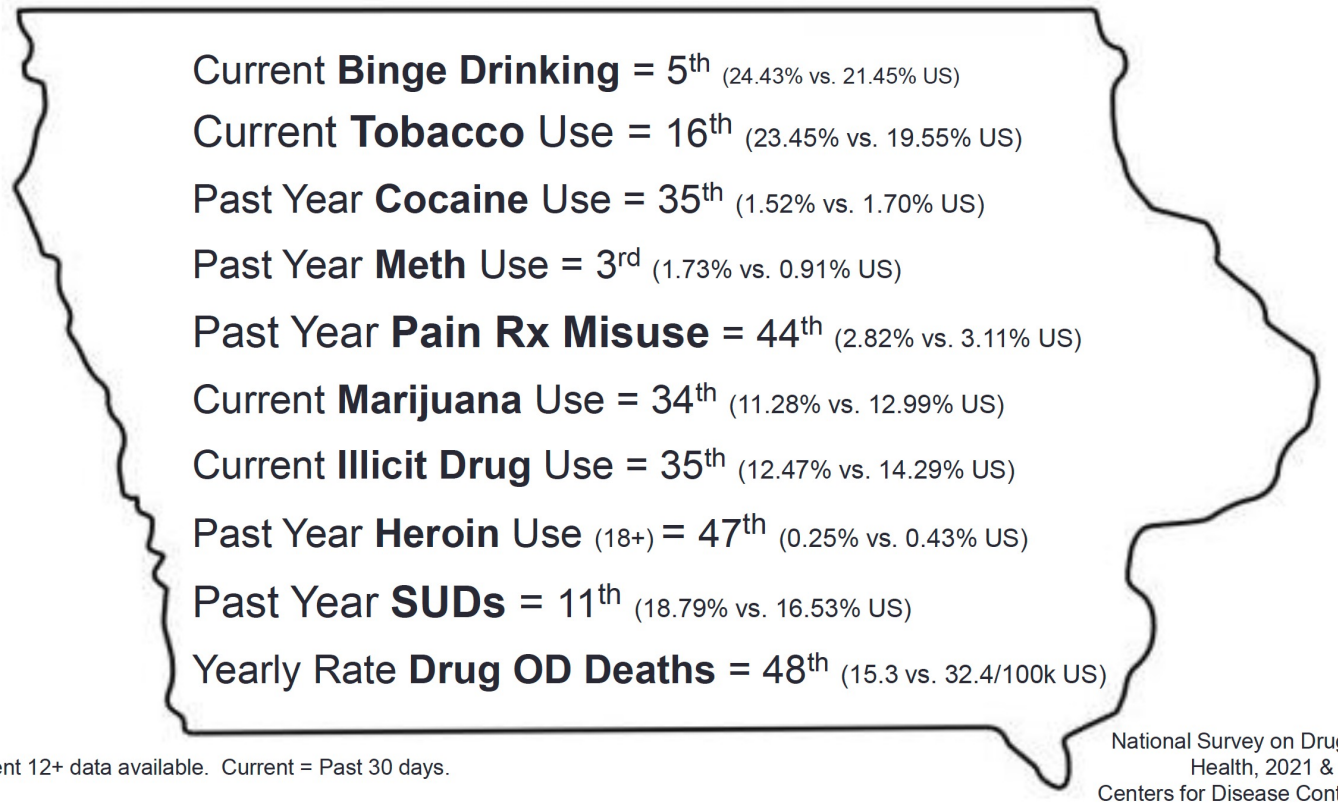
What is a Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

A chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences.

It is considered a brain disorder because it involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress, and self-control, and those changes may last a long time after a person has stopped taking drugs.

Addiction is a medical condition.

Substance Use in Context: How Iowa Compares



Most recent 12+ data available. Current = Past 30 days.

National Survey on Drug Use & Health, 2021 &
Centers for Disease Control, 2021

https://dps.iowa.gov/media/323/download?inline=

Substance Use in Context: How Iowa Compares

Current **Binge Drinking** = 5th (24.43% vs. 21.45% US)

HEALTH

Binge drinking rates in Iowa rank higher than any other state in the country

Kate Kealey
Des Moines Register

Updated May 12, 2025, 7:58 a.m. CT

Past Year **SUDs** = 11th (18.79% vs. 16.53% US)

Yearly Rate **Drug OD Deaths** = 48th (15.3 vs. 32.4/100k US)

Most recent 12+ data available. Current = Past 30 days.

National Survey on Drug Use & Health, 2021 &
Centers for Disease Control, 2021

https://dps.iowa.gov/media/323/download?inline=

The Recovery Ready Community Index: A Public Health Assessment Tool

Nov 2020
S. Dorius, C. Dorius, E. Talbert, K. Van Selous, I. Jahic,M. Nosrato, M. Voss

https://recovery-iowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/RRCI-Report-Final.pdf

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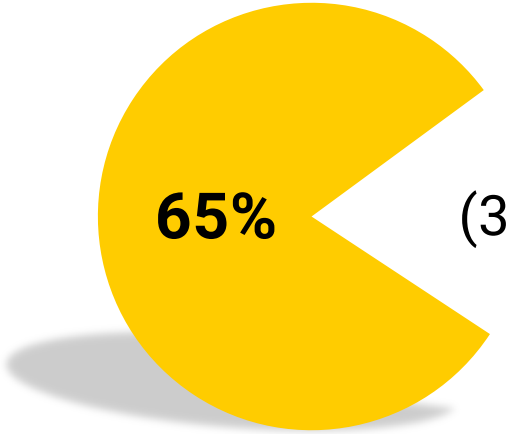
Substance Use Disorder (SUD) & Work

In 2022, ~46 million Americans 18 or older experienced a substance use disorder (SUD).



(30.1 million) were employed.

https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/substance-use/about/index.html

A Scenario by John F. Kelly, PhD, ABPP

It was a long day at the job and you leave work at 7:00 p.m. to head home. Once home, you decide to go out drinking with some friends to burn off some steam. After the night out, you come home with a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level of 0.25, so when starting the car up to head to work the next day at 8:00 a.m., you still have a BAC level of 0.14. A hangover headache kicks in around 10:00 a.m. at the all-staff meeting, and so you chug some water and are down to a 0.05 level by lunchtime.

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/addiction-recovery-101/201706/addiction-in-the-workplace-what-you-need-to-know

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Substance Use at Work Can Impact the Bottom Line

https://www.nsc.org/forms/substance-use-employer-calculator

https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/index.cfm?id=2621

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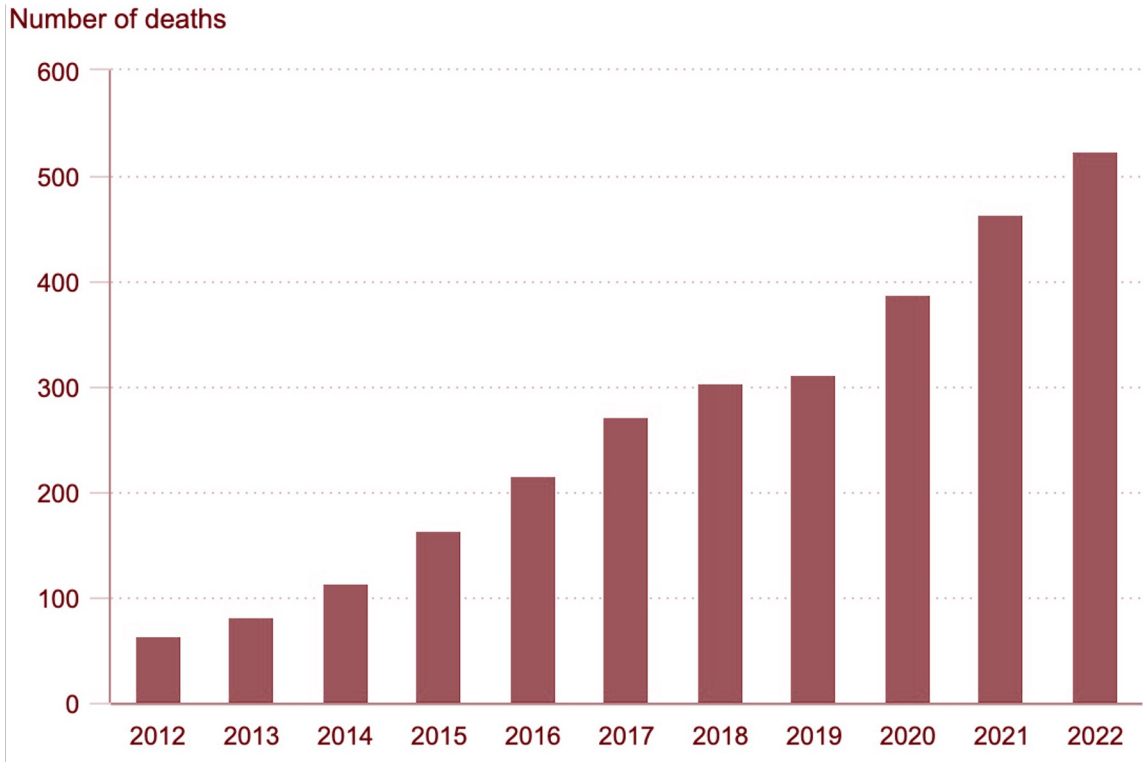
Workplace Overdose Deaths are Increasing

Workplace Deaths Due to Unintentional Overdoses From Nonmedical Use of Drugs or Alcohol



U.S. Dept of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/unintentional-overdoses-rose-for-the-tenth-straight-year-in-2022.htm

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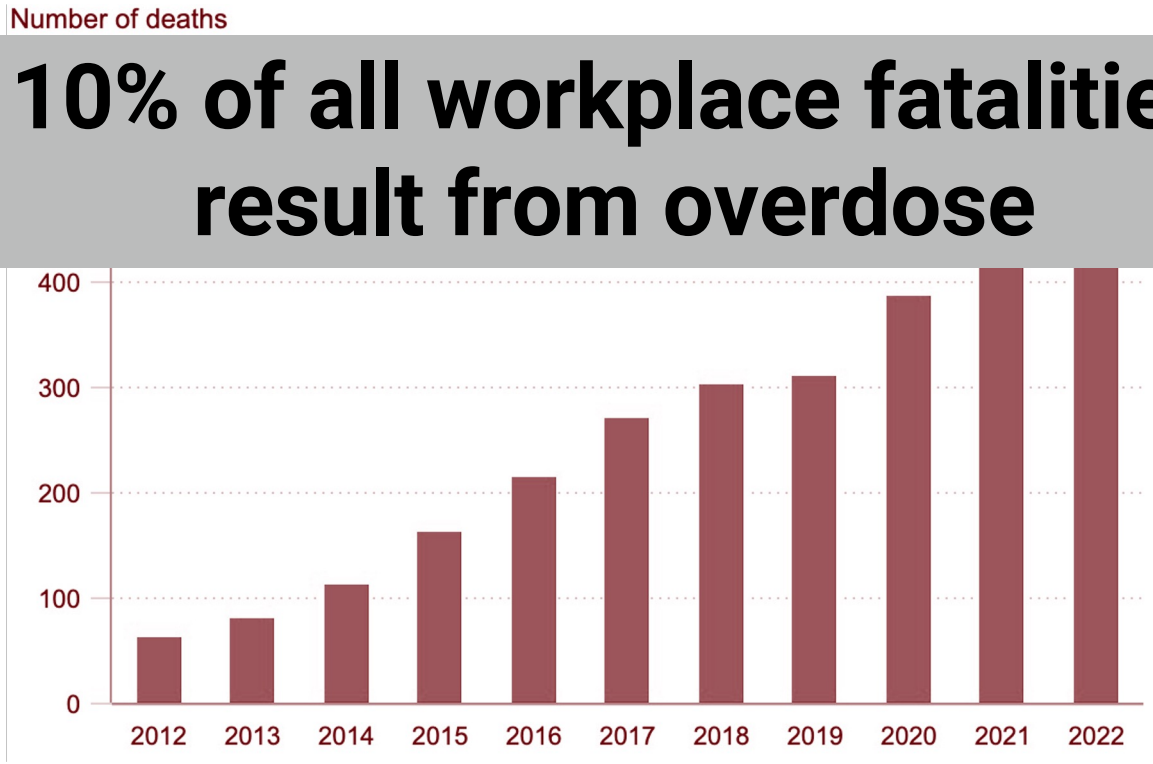
Workplace Overdose Deaths are Increasing

10% of all workplace fatalities result from overdose

Workplace Death Due to Unintentional Overdoses From Nonmedical Use of Drugs or Alcohol



U.S. Dept of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/unintentional-overdoses-rose-for-the-tenth-straight-year-in-2022.htm

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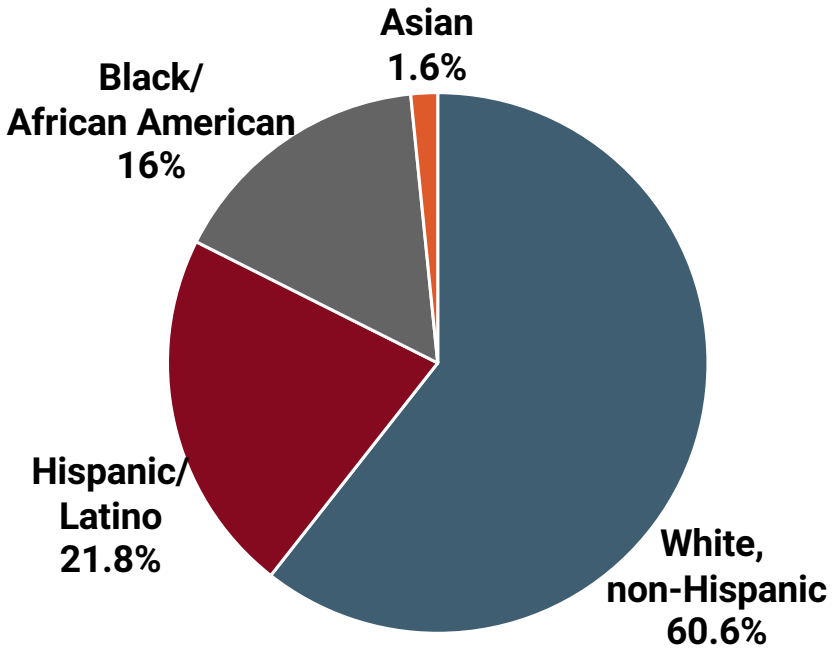
Workplace Overdose Deaths

Male: 86.3%
Female: 13.7%

Workplace Overdose Deaths by Race



https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/safety-topics/overdose-deaths/

Work-Related Characteristics for Drug Overdose Mortality

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1. Workplace injury
2. Work-related psychosocial stress

- Precarious employment
- Employer-provided health insurance status
- Access to paid sick leave
- Increased mental health conditions

National Vital Statistics Reports; vol 72 no 7. 2023. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:128631.

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Employment is a key part of recovery

Why focus on the workplace?

Benefits of Work

- Provides resources (income, paid time off, health benefits, retirement benefits)
- Provides time structure and regular activity, social contacts, purpose and meaning, development of skills, goal achievement, status and identity

Barriers at Work

- Negative work conditions (excessive demands, bullying, job insecurity, hazardous physical work, work-related injuries)
- Substance availability
- Stigma may undermine the initiation or sustainability of SUD recovery efforts

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10193449/

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Substance Use Disorders (SUD) in the Workplace

General Workforce
Any SUD
Alcohol Use Disorder
Pain Medication Disorder
In Recovery

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5671784/

Substance Use Disorders (SUD) in the Workplace

	Missed Work Days	Hospitalized Overnight	Serious Psychological Distress
General Workforce	**10.5 days**	**7.4%**	**4%**
Any SUD	14.8 days	7.9%	12%
Alcohol Use Disorder	14.1 days	7.9%	11%
Pain Medication Disorder	29.0 days	17.0%	28%
In Recovery	**9.5 days**	**7.3%**	**3%**

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5671784/

Why have employers created a recovery friendly workplace?

- Avoid losing a valuable employee
- Know someone who has struggled with addiction or overdose

- Recovery from a SUD is achievable and benefits workplaces, community, and society
- Attempts to recover from SUDs occur in environmental contexts that may support or undermine its initiation or sustainability

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10193449/

"We had some employees, one in particular, who had some attendance issues that ultimately led to her dismissal. A couple years after that, the individual called us back and requested to be considered her for rehire. She said to me that the reason she was so undependable before is because she was hooked on heroin. Long story short, we agreed to bring her back on a trial basis. She excelled, so we kind of looked at the Recovery Friendly Workplace as a potential source for employees that other folks may not have been looking for. The most rewarding part about becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace is seeing these folks go from being perceived as a net drain to a net contributor. I take every opportunity I can get to talk to other local businesses about Recovery Friendly Workplace environments."

—Dana Lariviere, President & CEO at NH RFW Chameleon Group

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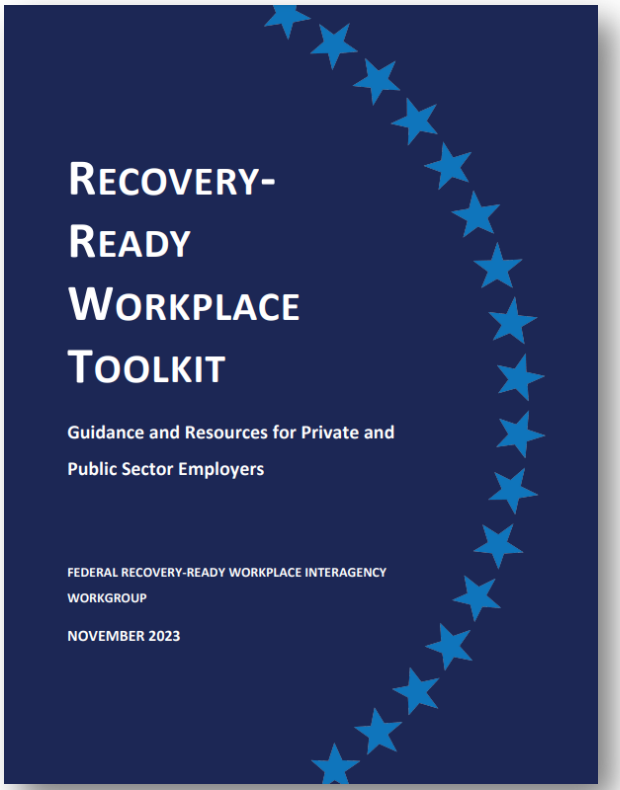
Workplace Toolkit



Prevention and Risk Reduction

Training and Education

Hiring and Employment

Treatment and Recovery Support

www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/RRW-hub/Toolkit

Prevention and Risk Reduction

- **Identify and address risk factors for SUD**
  - Physical Risk Factors: repetitive motion, lifting, equipment
  - Psychosocial Risk Factors: excess/unpredictable hours, toxic work environment

What else?

- **Examine benefit plans**
  - How are opioids used to treat pain (including work related injuries)
  - Is medical/disability leave available to allow recovery?
- **Review wellness programs to promote seeking help early**
- **Review policies about alcohol use at social events**

Training and Education

- **Training** on prevalence of SUD and recovery, impact on employees and workplace (reduce stigma)
- **Educate** on company policies and how to ask for help (EAP, insurance, medical/disability leave, return to work plans/policies/agreements, accommodations)
- **Promote community and workplace resources** (health and wellness programs, employee resource groups, peer support …)
- **Train managers/supervisors** (how to talk about SUD, available resources, return to work)

Survey found that workers would be more likely to ask for help with a SUD if their manager directly stated that employees could share with them about substance use problems.

More likely to share with their direct manager.

Hiring and Employment

- **Hire individuals in recovery** (work with treatment providers, recovery community organizations, supported employment programs, drug courts)
- **Eliminate questions about arrests/convictions from job applications -** defer them until a conditional job offer is made (certain states and federal government require this)
- **Support access to treatment**
- **Provide reasonable accommodations**

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US Worker Shortage

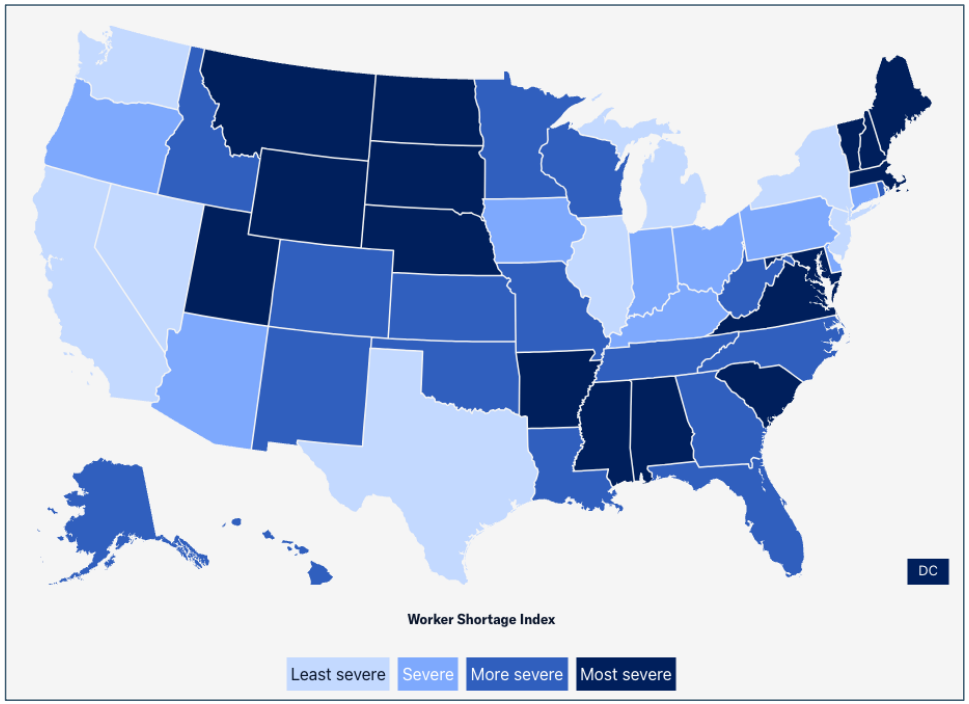
Currently 8M job openings, but only 6.8M unemployed workers

Iowa
67 available workers for every 100 open jobs

Illinois
76 available workers for every 100 open jobs

Missouri
53 available workers for every 100 open jobs

Nebraska
39 available workers for every 100 open jobs



https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/the-states-suffering-most-from-the-labor-shortage

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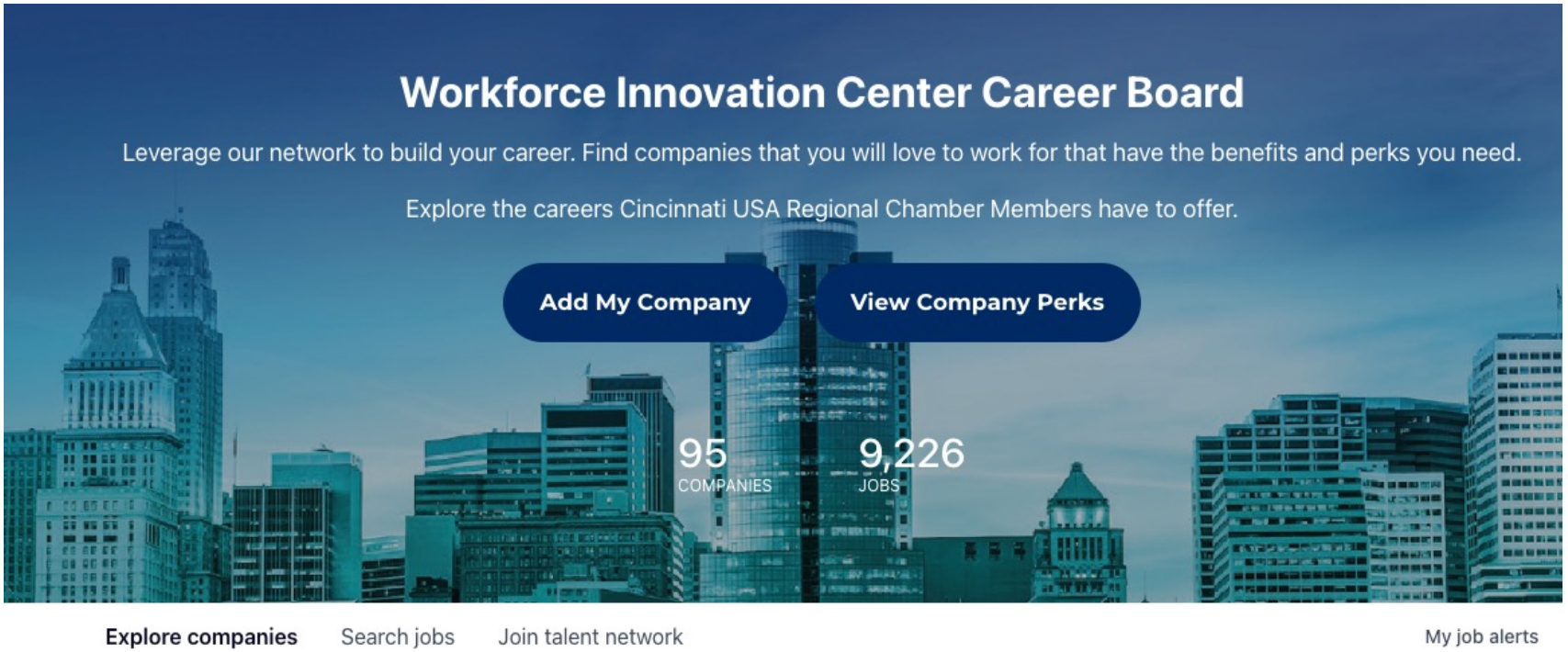
How do we connect people to employers?



https://workforceinnovationcenter.com/resources/employer-perks/

Treatment and Recovery Support

- **Review benefits** for access to comprehensive, evidence-based treatment
- **Build partnerships with providers, recovery organizations, and community groups**
- **Peer mentoring** program
- **Support employee efforts** to establish employee resource groups around recovery or substance free lifestyles

Peer Support Programs in the Workplace

Trained individuals (“peers”) to:

- assist other workers in **accessing services** for substance use or mental health disorders
- **support workers after they have returned to work** following treatment

CPWR Report https://www.cpwr.com/wp-content/uploads/Peer_Advocacy_Construction_Workers_Struggling_Substance_Use.pdf

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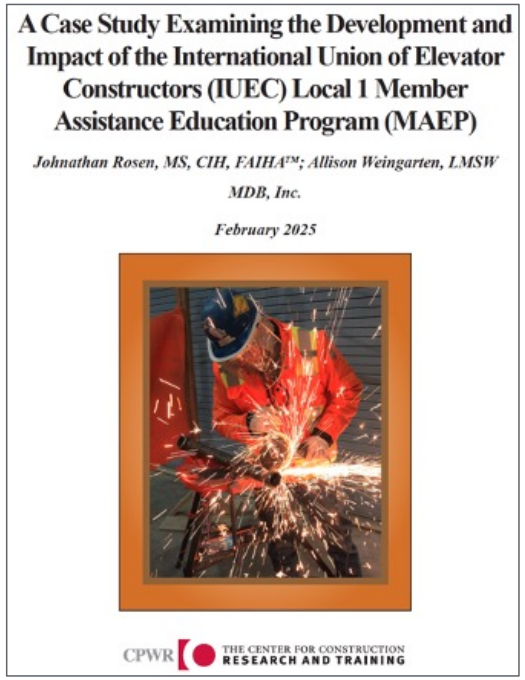
Case Study: Local 1 MAEP (Member Assistance and Education Program)

Member Assistance and Education Program

Prior to 2016, only about 10% of members who went for treatment maintained their recovery. After the IUEC established the MAEP program, ***which includes aftercare, sober living, and other supportive services****, 78% maintained recovery.*

LEANSTL
LABORERS ESCAPING ADVERSITY NOW



https://community.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/HigherLogic/System/DownloadDocumentFile.ashx?DocumentFileKey=af9e5cf4-14e2-4eed-b9f3-0195f1c76553&forceDialog=0

Benefits to the Community

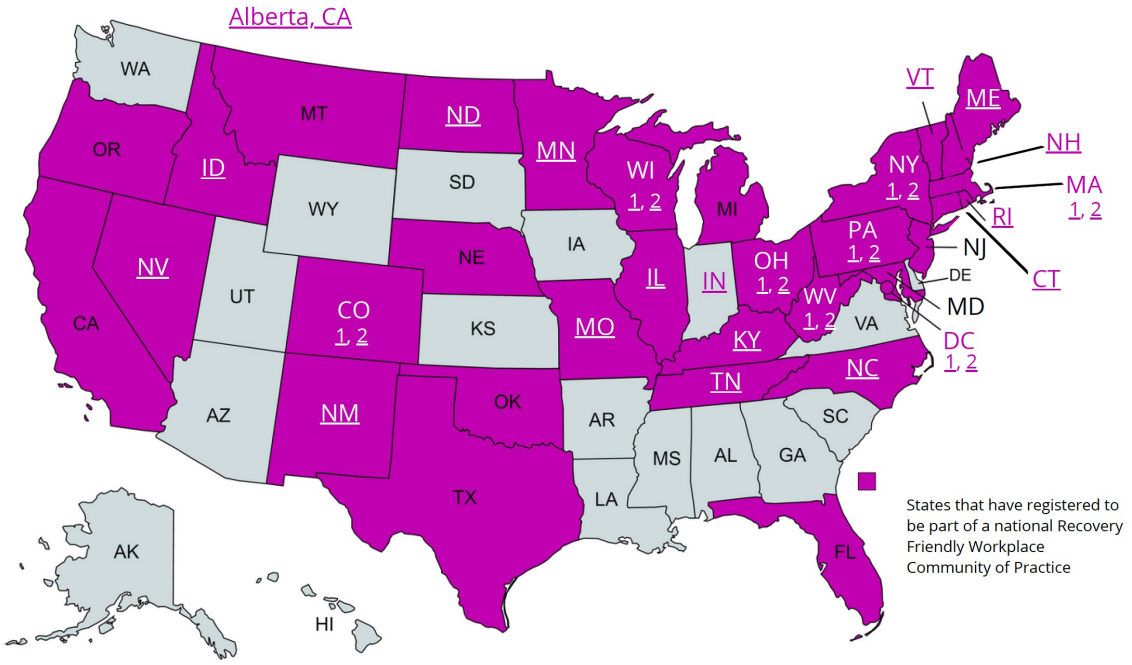
- Strengthens the local workforce
- Reduces community health and safety costs
- Enhances economic stability
- Promotes social inclusion and reduces stigma
- Improves quality of life and public well-being
- Builds community leadership and corporate citizenship

Let's Start the Conversation!

In 2012, untreated addiction costs New Hampshire's economy $2.36 billion. Approximately 66% of that cost ($1.5 billion) was incurred by businesses from impaired productivity and absenteeism - PolEcon Research

Source: New Futures, Inc., "The Corrosive Effects of Alcohol and Drug Misuse on NH's Workforce and Economy," November, 2014.

Recovery Friendly Workplace Engagement by State



Created by: NH's Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative, 2022; base map from mapchart.net

https://www.recoveryfriendlyworkplace.com/otherstates

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Iowa's Plan for Prevention, Treatment, and Enforcement

- Reduce substance-related injuries and deaths
- Reduce youth use of alcohol, nicotine, and marijuana (THC)
- **Increase timely access to substance use disorder (SUD) services**
- **Increase employment and quality of life for those in or completing SUD treatment**
- Increase accountable alternatives to incarceration for eligible drug-related offenses
- Reduce the disproportionate number of minorities referred to the justice system

https://dps.iowa.gov/bureaus-iowa-department-public-safety/iowa-office-drug-control-policy/drug-information#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20Iowa%20is,to%20record%20levels%20in%202021.

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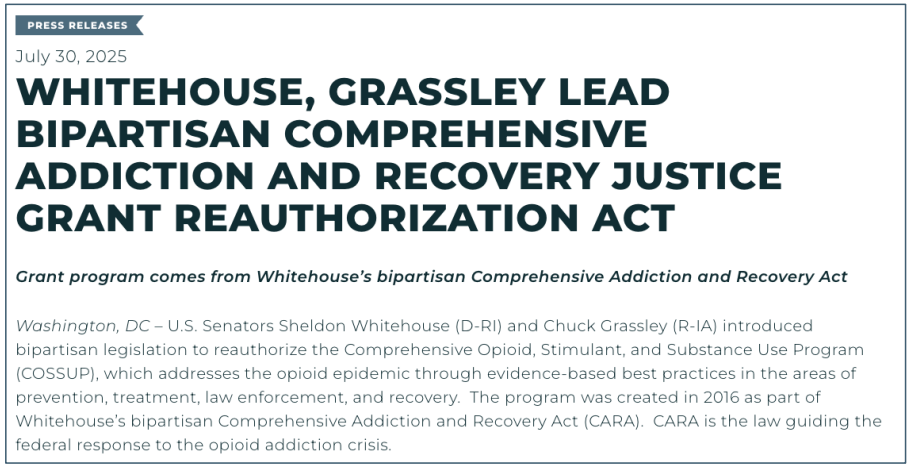
Bipartisan Support in Senate



PRESS RELEASES

July 30, 2025

WHITEHOUSE, GRASSLEY LEAD BIPARTISAN COMPREHENSIVE ADDICTION AND RECOVERY JUSTICE GRANT REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Grant program comes from Whitehouse's bipartisan Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act

Washington, DC – U.S. Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and Chuck Grassley (R-IA) introduced bipartisan legislation to reauthorize the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP), which addresses the opioid epidemic through evidence-based best practices in the areas of prevention, treatment, law enforcement, and recovery. The program was created in 2016 as part of Whitehouse's bipartisan Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA). CARA is the law guiding the federal response to the opioid addiction crisis.

Support state and local governments to **implement tailored evidence-based substance use disorder (SUD) prevention and treatment programming**, helping jurisdictions identify, respond to, treat, and support people with a substance use disorder.
https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/BILLS-119s2540is

Between 2021 and 2022, COSSUP allowed more than 94,000 people to enroll in recovery-support services, more than 32,000 people to enroll in substance-use treatment programs and 59,000 people to be trained on the use of Naloxone (an overdose-reversal drug).

https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/grassley-whitehouse-lead-bipartisan-reauthorization-of-life-saving-addiction-recovery-program

What can you do?

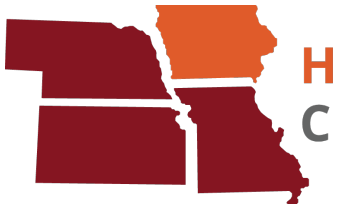
1. **Keep people employed** (reduce hazards, EAP, benefits, policies such as “second chance” hiring)
2. **Reduce stigma** through training/education (reduce barriers to seeking treatment)
3. **Support people** in recovery to get back into the workforce (job board, workplace accommodations)
4. **Peer support programs** to help individuals get to treatment and then returning to work
5. **Be a role model** (early adopter)

NIEHS. (2023). Recovery friendly workplace landscape analysis. https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstreams/0c419471-332e-4d50-a373-66dbdf4ec8bf/download

Addressing Recovery in Iowa Workplaces

- Creating educational resources for employers
- Surveying employers about their current policies and needs
- Cataloging evidence-based practices for RFW initiatives
- Engaging stakeholders
- Implementing RFW initiatives in Behavioral Districts 6 and 7

- **Developing an Iowa Initiative**



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People in Recovery

"Often have a high degree of **self-awareness**, **resilience**, **compassion**, **dedication** and **understanding**"

Research indicates that they also have **lower rates of turnover and absenteeism** than the average employee.

By facilitating the hiring of people in recovery, therefore, recovery-ready workplace policies can help employers tap into a dedicated and reliable pool of prospective employees.

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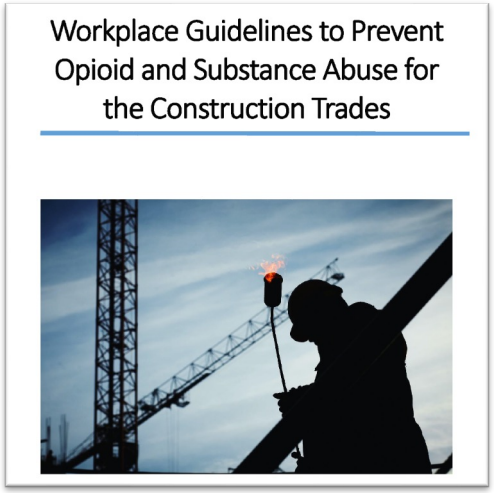
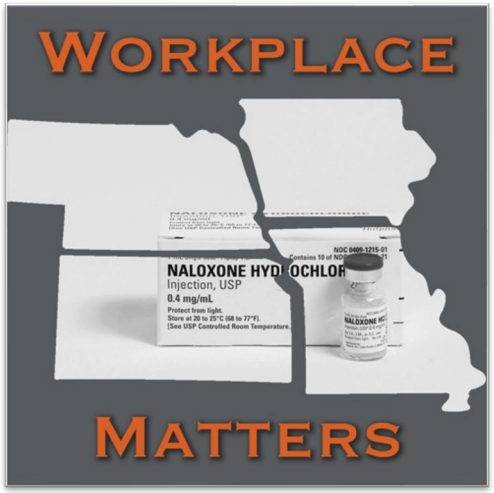
FREE Resources: www.HealthierWorkforceCenter.com



Opioid Guidelines



Recovery Friendly Workplaces

Suicide Prevention

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Statewide Employer Survey

Goal: To learn about efforts to address substance use and mental health and their impact on recruitment and retention

Bit.ly/2025EmployerSurvey

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www.HealthierWorkforceCenter.com