

STIGMA OF SUBSTANCE USE RECOVERY IN THE WORKPLACE



SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

- 1 in 14 Americans reports experiencing a Substance Use Disorder (SUD).¹
- SUDs develop when someone's use of drugs or alcohol causes health, work, or home problems.¹
- The repeated use of drugs can lead to changes in the brain that inhibits the ability to resist the craving for drugs, which is the chronic disease of addiction.²
- Addiction is a treatable medical condition and like other chronic diseases, can be managed successfully.^{2 3}
- Treatment for addiction is an ongoing and lengthy process that can often have relapses even years later.²
- Treatment is specific to each patient and may need methods such as medication-assisted treatment, twelve-step programs, counseling, and inpatient rehabilitation.¹



STIGMA OF SUBSTANCE USE AND ADDICTION

- Stigma is a negative or unfair judgement or belief about a person or group based upon a particular characteristic such as substance use.³
- Stigma of addiction and substance use disorders can trigger guilt and shame causing people to hide their problem and avoid getting help.⁴
- Workplaces may have a decrease in morale due to stigma.³
- People with a substance use disorder experience intense stigmatization through harmful attitudes that lead to prejudice, inequity, exclusion, and few options to engage in employment and social roles.^{1 5}
- Stigma keeps people with substance use disorders from seeking help.⁴
- Stigma injures one's sense of self-esteem and escalates feelings of stress and isolation.³
- Workers struggling with substance misuse may have a loss in productivity.³



REDUCING STIGMA IN WORKPLACES

Workplaces provide an important role in helping employees battling against substance use disorders. According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), "Employment provides economic stability, a meaningful social role, and often direct access to treatment and recovery services."⁵ Here are some considerations for employers to reduce stigma in the work environment:

- Educate supervisors and employees to understand the condition of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) and eliminating the prejudice of stigma.^{5 6}
- Utilize an Employee Assistance Program to support all workers' health and wellness.⁶

- Ensure health insurance benefits are available that offer treatment for substance use disorders and mental health.⁶
- Implement wellness policies to build understanding and support employees dealing with substance use disorders.^{5 6}
- Utilize person-first language in the workplace to accurately reflect the condition e.g. “person with a substance use disorder” to respect the dignity of those with this or any disease.^{5 6}
- Offer accommodations for persons who are actively pursuing treatment and recovery.⁶
- Ensure that substance use policies are evidence-based.⁵



HOW PEOPLE CAN PERSONALLY REDUCE STIGMA

At present, it is unfortunately common that many people know someone, perhaps a loved one or friend, that is struggling with a substance use disorder or who has died from an overdose. Informing others of substance use disorders by talking about it could prevent individuals from initiating use or encourage someone to get help. Some of the ways individuals can personally help to decrease stigma are:

- Informing others about substance use disorders.⁶
- Demonstrating person-first language (person with a substance use disorder, not addict or drug abuser).⁶
- Dispelling misconceptions.⁶
- Sharing success stories that recovery is a journey and is achievable.⁶
- Advocating for recovery.⁶
- Using social media to share resources.⁶

Accessible educational materials and resources, as well as consistent discussions of the actual nature of substance use disorders, treatment, and recovery, may help reduce stigma and encourage those who suffer from the disease to enter into treatment and recovery.



Resources:

- Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education, SAMHSA Toolkit- https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/pep21-pl-guide-6.pdf
- Reducing Stigma-Understanding Addiction and Supporting Recovery, CDC Infographic- https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/stigma/pdf/Stigma_Fact_Sheet_508c.pdf
- The Recovery Friendly Toolkit, CT Department of Labor, Department of Public Health, & Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services - https://www.recoveryworksct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DHMAS001_RFW-Toolkit-Full-Update-121021.pdf

References:

- ¹ CDC. (2021, July 19). Stigma Reduction. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/stigma/index.html>
- ² NIDA. 2018, June 6. Understanding Drug Use and Addiction Drug Facts. Retrieved from <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-use-addiction> on 2022, February 14
- ³ CT Department of Labor, CT Department of Public Health, & Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. (2021, January 1). The Recovery Friendly Toolkit. Retrieved from https://www.recoveryworksct.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DHMAS001_RFW-Toolkit-Full-Update-121021.pdf
- ⁴ Northwestern Medicine. (n.d.). Removing the Stigma of Addiction. Retrieved from <https://www.nm.org/healthbeat/healthy-tips/emotional-health/removing-the-stigma-of-addiction>
- ⁵ CDC-NIOSH. (2020, July 27). Workplace Supported Recovery Program. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/opioids/wsrp/default.html#b>
- ⁶ Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education SAMHSA - https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/pep21-pl-guide-6.pdf

