

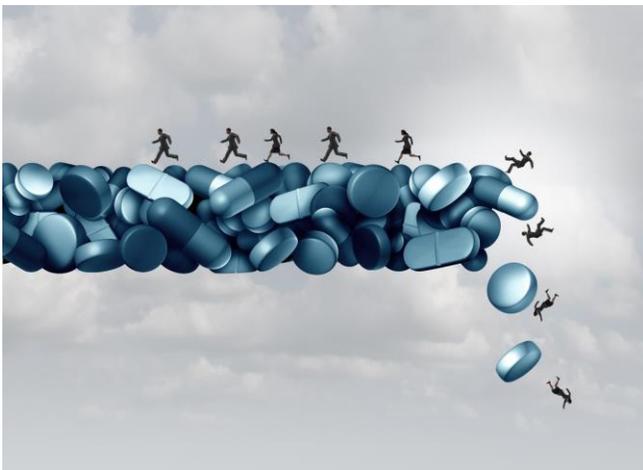
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Substance Abuse and Opioids Are Not an Issue with My Employees...or Are They?

By Cory Panning

Productivity, medical claims, work injuries, and the company's bottom line; what do these things all have in common? They are all being drastically affected by the effects of substance abuse. The opioid crisis is running rampant across the United States and is affecting employees at every level.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH), every day, more than 115 people in the U.S. die after overdosing on opioids. It is not just the deadly heroin/fentanyl combination that we have been hearing about in the daily news; sources of opioid addiction include prescription pain relievers such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, oxymorphone, morphine, codeine, and other prescribed substances. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates prescription opioid misuse in the U.S. cost \$78.5 billion per year; affecting medical spend, productivity, and law enforcement supervision.



Substance abuse does not discriminate on any demographic, however if your business is construction, entertainment, recreation, or food service, the National Safety Council (NSC) found your employees are twice as likely as the national average to have substance abuse disorders.

Secondly, you need to take action. The most important thing an employer can do is to have a proactive plan in place to help your employees live a healthy lifestyle. It is easy to get in the habit of saying "that does not happen here," but the reality is substance abuse can—and does—happen anywhere. Solving the opioid crisis won't happen overnight, but here are some steps to take to build a better relationship with your employees and quite possibly help someone overcome a substance abuse problem.

1. **Train your staff.** Explain what resources are available to help them help your employees. If you have an employee assistance program in place, leverage it, and have the information easily available so any employee can access the information at any time. This will help lower the fear barrier for employees who are not ready to ask someone they know for help. If you do not have the right resources in place today there are many programs available, and it is important that you adopt one that will fit your culture and help employees be high performers.
2. **Show employees you care.** Look for signs and symptoms that an employee might have a problem with substance abuse. Make sure supervisors, managers, and team leaders are aware of these signs and what actions they should take. Have an open door policy, and make sure your employees feel they can ask for assistance when they need it. It is important to know how to handle sensitive, often painful, discussions in a professional and action oriented manner. It is essential that you have the right steps in place to ensure leadership is aligned with the organization's strategy on how best to help your at-risk population.

3. **Be transparent.** Have clear policies in place that promote a drug free workplace. Consider expanding your drug testing panel to include opioids.
4. **Share the savings.** Consider sharing the dollars a successful well-being program will save your organization's bottom line through lower prescription drug costs and less lost productivity due to illness and time away from work.

If your organization is struggling with how to successfully address the challenges of substance abuse and opioid addiction, let our consultants help you develop a strategy for success.

Questions? Contact the Findley consultant you normally work with or contact Cory Panning at cory.panning@findley.com, 419.327.4190.