

Promoting Wellness in the Workplace

Introduction

In 2023, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the Domestic Policy Council, and 12 federal departments and independent agencies, including SAMHSA, published the [Recovery-Ready Workplace \(RRW\) Toolkit](#) to expand employment opportunities for people in recovery from substance use disorders (SUD) and to promote RRW policies.

So why are recovery-ready or recovery friendly workplaces so important?

- Work is a social determinant of health including behavioral health.¹
- Over 22 million Americans are in SUD recovery, two-thirds of which are employed. And of those employed, 80% have full-time jobs.²
- About 50% of Americans get their health insurance through their employer.³
- It is a health equity issue. Individuals with substance use and mental health conditions should be treated with the same dignity and protections in the workplace as individuals with physical health conditions.

The “golden threads” of recovery are having love and loving what you do.

David Best, Researcher on Recovery Capital
SAMHSA’s Wellness in the Workplace Summit

Characteristics of a Recovery-Ready Workplace

A recovery-ready workplace (RRW) is not one-size fits all and should be tailored to the specific business and resources available. Following these general principles can help businesses improve their recovery-readiness:

- Expand employment opportunities for people in or seeking recovery. This includes “second chance” programs for individuals who have had justice involvement, creating a path to self-sufficiency.
- Facilitate help-seeking for employees with substance use and mental health conditions.

The most important characteristic of a RRW is a culture of empathy.

Michael Rose, Society for Human Resource Management
SAMHSA’s Wellness in the Workplace Summit

- Expand access to needed services, including availability of assessments and referrals, treatment, recovery support, and mutual aid. This includes providing quality health insurance and schedule flexibility.
- Build awareness among management and staff about job accommodations and reducing stigma. This includes using respectful language and building psychological safety.
- Provide reasonable accommodations and job protections that prohibit discrimination. Businesses may need to review their policies to ensure that they support and mirror these intentions.
- Support families and caregiver needs related to substance use and mental health conditions among their loved ones.
- Make harm reduction supplies/services such as naloxone and training on its use available onsite.

Making the Business Case

Businesses themselves also benefit from RRW policies. Among the benefits include access to an expanded available labor force, increased worker well-being, decreased turnover, improved productivity, and reduced health care costs.

The National Safety Council with the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago have developed [The Real Cost of Substance Use to Employers cost calculator](#) so that business leaders can assess the positive impact a RRW program can have in their workplace.

Johns Hopkins University’s [Institute for Health and Productivity Studies](#) also provides resources on the relationship between employee health and well-being, health care utilization and costs, and work-related productivity.

Employers can save an average of \$8,500 for supporting each employee in recovery from substance use condition.

The [National Safety Council](#)

The Role of States and Municipalities

Governmental entities have key roles to play in promoting the adoption of RRW policies in the private sector, including providing technical assistance, leadership, policy changes, and funding. States and municipalities should also model this important initiative by becoming RRWs, themselves.

Case Examples	
New Hampshire	Governor’s Recovery Friendly Initiative . Has over 370 workplace designees representing over 94,000 employees.
Hamilton County, Ohio	The Public Health Department provides linkages to care, training, harm reduction supplies, policy and protocol resources.
New York State	The PARSE Coalition advocates for supportive workplaces and provides materials/resources.
Washington State	The Department of Commerce’s Foundational Community Supports (FCS) program provides supportive employment services.

Statutory and regulatory policy changes can be impactful and improve service access, including expanding telehealth access, clinical/peer practice intrastate compact agreements, and tax credits for caregivers.

Employers and Unions

Business leaders do not need to pursue this effort alone. Many school systems, airlines, transit systems, Tribal locations, and unions have strived to become RRWs. Local chambers of commerce, community-based organizations, and multi-employer efforts can facilitate the regional adoption of RRW policies.

Case Examples	
International Union of Operating Engineers	Implemented a peer support program. Also provides Naloxone rescue kits at every construction site.
International Union of Elevator Constructors	Conducted focus groups and surveys to develop a comprehensive member assistance education program.
University of Colorado	Initiative includes training, recovery services, job protection, and quality comprehensive insurance coverage.
Leidos CEO Pledge	Over 200 business executives agreed to form a Collaborative Action Group to support employee behavioral health needs.

Support

Employers can leverage staff and external experts to help them build and maintain their RRW status:

Human Resource Personnel – The [Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\)](#) can be a beneficial resource for human resource policies and procedures.

Peer Support Workers – These are trusted individuals with lived experience either internal or external to the business. If internal, the peer should be compensated for this additional work and accomplishments included in their job evaluation.

Labor Assistance Professionals – These may be internal or part of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). Many EAPs are underutilized, so it is important to assess why (e.g., lack of awareness, concern about confidentiality).

Leadership – Leadership buy-in is important to shape the culture and provide resources.

Employees – Because employees are most likely to go to a co-worker or their direct manager for assistance, it is important to broadly provide training and promote the effort so that the entire workforce is aware of available resources.

Where to Start

Learn More and Get Help – Find state and local government support for RRWs. Seek out a certification program like the [National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute](#) or Mental Health America's [Bell Seal](#)

[Certification](#) for technical assistance. These programs can serve both large and small businesses and can tailor approaches based on the workplace's industry and current readiness.

Solicit Leadership Buy-In – Make the business case for RRW policies. Personal stories (if available) of individuals in recovery are also compelling.

Develop an Approach and Measure its Outcome – This is an evaluation process and each business has different resources and needs. Metrics could include employee retention rates, productivity, absenteeism.

Communicate and Promote – Employees and frontline managers need to have a thorough understanding for the RRW for the program to be successful. This can include trainings, poster placement, and routine correspondence. Businesses may also want to promote their program to their customers and community.

Resources

Technical Assistance

U.S Department of Labor's [Recovery Ready Workplace Toolkit](#)

[National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute](#)

New Hampshire's [Recovery-Friendly Employer Packet](#)

CDC's [Total Worker Health®](#)

National Safety Council's [Workplace Wellbeing Hub](#)

[Mental Health America's Bell Seal Certification](#)

[Mental Health America's Workplace Wellness Resource Center](#)

[Work Opportunity Tax Credit](#)

[The Federal Bonding Program](#) (employer insurance)

[SAMHSA's Supportive Employment Evidence-Based Practices \(EBP\) Kit](#)

[Office of Disability Employment](#)

[IPS Employment Center](#)

[SAMHSA'S Guide on Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment](#)

Peer Organizations and Support

[One World Recovery Network](#) (provides apprenticeships)

[Youturn Health](#)

Research and White Papers

[Employer Investments in Digital, Whole-Person Health for Substance Use Disorders](#)

[Understanding and Identifying Gaps in Employer Mental Health Resources](#)

[Fors Marsh 2022 Workplace Recovery Survey](#)

CDC's National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences [Recovery Friendly Workplace Landscape Analysis](#)

Johns Hopkins University's [Institute for Health and Productivity Studies](#)

Mental Health America's [Workplace Mental Health: Trends and Practices of Top Employers](#)

Other

[Carolyn C. Mattingly Award for Mental Health in the Workplace](#) (Employer Recognition Program)

[One Million Civil Conversations](#) (Promotes Workplace Civility)

[Connect2Prevent](#) (Training for parents to discuss behavioral health with their youth)

[National Safety Council Employer Cost Calculator for Substance Abuse](#)

Citations

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2020). *Healthy People 2030*.
<https://health.gov/healthypeople>

² [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education](#). Publication No. PEP21-PL-Guide-6 Rockville, MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 2021.

³ [Kaiser Family Foundation. State health Facts: Health Insurance Coverage of the Total population \(CPS\)](#). 2022