



## Key Steps – Getting Started

Workplaces may choose to work on the Opioids at Work Employer Toolkit Key Recommendations individually, simultaneously, or in chunks. This decision is unique to the workplace, and will depend on individual needs and internal capacity. Working on any of the key steps helps!

When deciding how to proceed, ensure that representation from the entire organization is present at the initial meetings, including management, marketing and communications teams, human resources, environmental health and safety professionals, legal representatives, and employees themselves. If you decide to implement changes on a 12 month plan, please refer to *Implementing an Opioid Policy: a Month-By-Month Plan*. If you choose to work recommendation by recommendation, use this document for key steps to take as you get started.

### OBTAINING SENIOR LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

- Utilize the [Substance Use Cost Calculator](#) to educate yourself, leadership, and the rest of the team on the impacts of opioid use and misuse on the workplace
- Ask management, HR, and safety teams to review key recommendations and identify areas in which improvements or changes should be made
- Research local community groups who address the opioid crisis that your company could support, or events that leadership and employees alike could engage in (5Ks, fundraisers, etc.)
- Ensure that employees are consistently and frequently receiving education and communications on opioids, their risks, and support available to them

### ENGAGING AND EDUCATING EMPLOYEES

- Using the Employee Education section of the Opioids at Work Employer Toolkit, select a variety of educational materials and distribute to supervisors along with instructions on how and when to use them
- Start to include frequent opioid-specific components in employee communications materials, such as newsletters and communications from leadership
- Order [Warn Me labels](#) for your workforce – learn the best ways to implement them in the *Warn Me Label User Guide*. Hang up the Warn Me labels poster and ask employees to affix the labels to their insurance cards
- Plan an education session with employees using the PowerPoint provided in the Employee Education section of the Opioids at Work Employer Toolkit – consider including information about your organization’s resources (reminders on how to access employee assistance programs [EAPs], sharing a survivor advocate video with staff, bring in a local organization to do a brown bag lunch or Q & A session with employees)

### TRAINING MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

Using the Supervisors suite of documents, ensure supervisors are trained on:

- The organization's Drug Free Workplace Policy (DFWP) and how it relates to impairment
- Communicating with employees about impairment, the DFWP and where they can go for more information
- Understanding substance use disorders (SUDs) and their potential relationship to impairment, and recognizing symptoms of impairment and how to respond in an impairment-related crisis
- Drug testing procedures and other protocol related to impairment; consequences of noncompliance with testing procedures
- Required procedures and documentation when workplace impairment is observed
- Appropriate resources to offer employees who need to address problematic substance use, and understanding how stigma adversely impacts employees with a SUD

### HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES

- Ask your HR team member to draft a revised drug-free workplace policy based on the core tenants outlined in *Developing a Drug-Free Workplace Program* and *Sample Policy* in the HR section of this toolkit
- Take the draft through a review process (ask for review from a team of leadership, supervisors, safety professionals, and employees). Incorporate feedback, and once the organization has consensus, send a draft of the new drug-free workplace policy to legal counsel for review, and integrate feedback
- Once approved, host an education session with supervisors. Ensure time to ask and answer questions.
- Provide employees with a copy of the drug-free workplace policy. Work with your IT department to establish an email account so employees can send confidential concerns directly to the implementation team, with no fear of retribution. Remember, open communication is essential to obtaining and maintaining employee buy-in.
- Host a town hall meeting to answer employee questions. Stress that you are moving toward a recovery-friendly workplace culture – one that values safety and treats substance use disorders as a chronic disease rather than a decision or moral failure.

### ANALYZING DATA

- Work with your third party administrators to understand what is happening in your workforce. Data from worker's compensation claims, the pharmacy benefit management program, and the employer health care plan can show trends on prescribing (both doctors who are prescribing and opioid prescription rates), and identify risk factors for opioid misuse and raise red flags when problematic opioid use is identified.
- Learn about what is happening in the community – what drugs are present? Where are overdoses happening? Understanding these local factors can help guide policy development to have the most impact.
- Recognize that this data shows broad trends, not individual cases. When using data to guide policy development, avoid inflexible policies that don't allow for individual medical needs and treatment

### UPDATING HEALTH CARE AND PHARMACY BENEFIT MANAGEMENT PLANS

- Alternative pain management options (acupuncture, physical therapy, chiropractic care, etc.) should be provided at the same cost as pharmaceutical options, and should have flexible end dates for coverage
- All components of treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) should be covered, including but not limited to medications for medication assisted treatment (methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone), behavioral health interventions and programs, in- and out-patient services, detoxification services, and more. Prior authorization should be removed when possible.
- As each individual's journey through treatment and recovery will take different amounts of time, coverage should not be limited to an arbitrary duration.
- Pharmacy lock-in programs, utilization-management tools and other emerging technological and analytical tools can all play a role in reducing access to unnecessary opioid prescriptions, and can help identify employees who are showing signs of early opioid misuse.

### ENSURING A SAFE, HAZARD-FREE WORKPLACE

- Encourage supervisors to incorporate opioid-related 5 Minute Safety Talks, videos, and other educational materials on impairment and opioid use and misuse frequently throughout the year
- Follow all safety regulations and guidelines. Fewer workplace hazards and fewer workplace incidents lead to fewer workplace injuries, minimizing potential opioid prescriptions

### DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Openly talk about the opioid crisis and substance use disorders, and remember to emphasize that recovery is possible and likely – always provide a message of hope
- If they don't exist already, develop wellness programming for the workplace. 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
- Consider not providing alcohol at work events, or provide a variety of non-alcoholic options, and encourage healthy after-hour activities in addition to or instead of happy hour
- Always ensure lines of confidential communication for employees who may be struggling with an opioid use disorder. Without confidentiality, there will be no trust and employees will not feel safe coming forward when they need help.



### Additional tips

Decide how your organization wants to monitor success of your policies and procedures. Considering using the *Sample Employee Engagement Survey* to obtain feedback from employees, and work with your third party administrators to assess how prescribing rates, EAP access and other data changes over time.

Make sure that you keep supplies in stock – for example, include Warn Me labels during your new-hire orientation, and at the beginning of the calendar year when new health insurance cards may be issued.

Have consistent messaging about ways to seek help at work, and ensure managers and supervisors are promptly and consistently trained on what to do if an employee asks for help.

Remember that talking about addiction and substance use disorders can be very personal for some people – defensive reactions are common. While abiding by your organization’s drug free workplace policy is not optional, employee’s privacy must be respected. Employees should not feel pressured to publicly disclose personal information.

### Need help?

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