

# Executive Summary

## Opioids and the Workplace

Opioids are a class of drug that includes prescription painkillers and heroin. Prescription opioids are a widely used method of treating pain. When used under a healthcare provider’s supervision and in accordance with opioid prescribing guidelines, they can be an effective treatment. However, they also have a great potential for dependence, development of an opioid use disorder (OUD), and fatal overdose.

Prevention, treatment, and recovery are three types of parallel services that can have a significant impact on minimizing risks associated with opioid use. Prevention involves measures to avoid misuse and dependence by reducing medical and non-medical exposure to opioids. Treatment involves diagnosis and professional treatment of individuals diagnosed with an OUD. Since OUD is a chronic disease, the goal of treatment is a remission of symptoms. Recovery for a person with chronic disease involves active ongoing self-management that often requires the help of biological, psychological, and social supports.

In response to a sharp increase in opioid misuse and opioid-related overdoses, the United States declared a nationwide public health emergency in October 2017. Today, individuals, families, and communities across the nation are still facing significant emotional, social, physical, and financial impacts. Workplaces are no exception, with 70% of them in America reporting feeling the impact of the crisis in multiple ways including safety, absenteeism, productivity, retention, healthcare spend, and hiring.

Employers have an important role in promoting, protecting, and supporting the health and safety of their employees and their families. Fortunately, there are many ways that employers can engage in supporting employees who are facing the challenges of the opioid crisis while also positively impacting their business.

## Data Analytics to Understand the Workforce

Employers can utilize their pharmacy and medical data to understand the status of their workforce’s substance use disorder (SUD) and OUD risks and trends. The first step is understanding key characteristics of the employee population, including enrollment data, medical and pharmacy spend, top conditions and medication, and total mental health and SUD expenditures. By looking at the appropriate measures, employers can have many of their SUD and OUD related questions answered in relation to prevention, treatment, and recovery, including:

### Prevention

- How often are members being exposed to opioids?
- Why are members being prescribed opioids?
- Are members receiving appropriate care to manage their pain?
- Are members who are exposed to opioids at risk?
- Are members overdosing on opioids?

### Treatment and Recovery

- How many members have been diagnosed with SUD?
- Are members with SUD accessing treatment?

## Healthcare Benefits to Increase Access to Evidence-Based Services

Healthcare benefits should align with evidence-based OUD prevention, treatment, and recovery services to ensure that health plan members are able to access appropriate, timely, and effective care. Employers should compare their current health plan benefits to the following recommendations and identify any opportunities for enhancement. Furthermore, employers should consider coverage limitations, cost-sharing, and utilization management as they relate to these benefits.

<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help employees manage pain</li><li>• Cover screening in primary care offices</li><li>• Cover site-of-use disposal</li><li>• Offer employee assistance programs (EAP)</li></ul>	<b>Treatment and Recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide access for inpatient and outpatient care</li><li>• Cover medication for opioid use disorder</li><li>• Provide access to behavioral and mental health services</li><li>• Cover naloxone to reduce mortality</li><li>• Improve access to behavioral healthcare through telemedicine</li><li>• Consider centers of excellence and alternative payment models</li></ul>
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## Policies to Transform Culture and Protect the Workplace

Workplace policies can play an important role in determining the culture of a workplace, as well as protecting employers and employees. To facilitate these improvements, employers should consider the following policy recommendations in relation to their respective service.

<b>Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Educate employees and supervisors</li><li>• Create a culture of support</li><li>• Develop a workplace substance use policy</li><li>• Implement effective and privacy-sensitive drug testing</li></ul>	<b>Treatment and Recovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offer leaves of absence and flexible scheduling</li><li>• Provide support group resources</li><li>• Develop a return to work policy</li></ul>
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## Legal Issues to Consider

As with many workplace interventions, there are also legal considerations. Employers should familiarize themselves with relevant laws, consult their labor and employment attorney, and if relevant, their labor relations team. Some laws that employers should consider are the Health Insurance Portability and Account Act (HIPAA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA). Some potential issues include identification and disclosure, intervention and confidentiality, discrimination and reasonable accommodation, and special-industry regulations.