

Addiction: A Hidden Epidemic in the Workplace

*How Employers Can Better Support Their Employees
and Strengthen the Bottom Line*



DENVER
METRO
CHAMBER
OF COMMERCE

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS GUIDE:

Addiction can impact any business – whether it’s an employee battling this disease or a family member. This guide will explain how addiction impacts employers, share steps you can take to address the issue and introduce one company that has found success in providing these resources to its employees.

A COSTLY BUSINESS CHALLENGE

WHETHER YOU WORK AT A COMPANY with 50 employees or 5,000, you have colleagues impacted by alcohol or other drug addiction. They have someone in their lives battling this disease – a son or daughter, a spouse or partner, a sibling or friend.

Those coworkers come to work distracted and stressed. The stigma of addiction prevents them from asking for help and, as a result, their diminished productivity is misunderstood. They may quit or be terminated.

Many employers believe that addiction doesn’t affect their business because they have a highly educated workforce or they drug test. With almost 10 percent of adults suffering from addiction, and at least three or four additional people impacted as loved ones, that’s simply not true. Employees have been trained for generations to keep family worries about issues like addiction to themselves out of shame or fear of losing their jobs.

As the opioid crisis continues to make headlines, addiction is a growing concern in every industry.

In the Denver region, the estimated annual economic impact of addiction is \$884 million. Employers bear the brunt of the costs.

Research shows that more than 70 percent of people with addiction are employed either part or full time. But because of the nature of this disease, and the stigma that comes with it, many suffer in silence, including the family members of those struggling. These colleagues don’t know where to turn for help.

“Although many don’t realize it, employers shoulder the cost of addiction due to higher health care costs, more turnover and increased absenteeism, among other things. The good news is that employers have more tools at their disposal to help employees and their family members get well with effective and confidential support.”

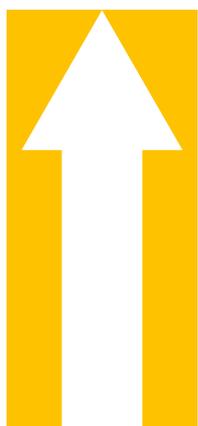
– Jane Ingalls, president of Face It TOGETHER, an organization that partners with employers to provide professional peer coaching for addiction to those battling the disease and their loved ones.

THE BOTTOMLINE IMPACT OF IGNORING ADDICTION

Untreated addiction hurts every business, regardless of industry, location or size.

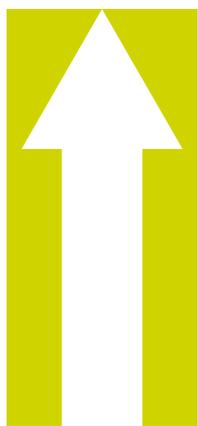
Research shows that helping employees impacted by addiction makes financial sense for employers. Employees who have survived addiction are assets in the workplace. In fact, workers in recovery from addiction miss the fewest days of any demographic, including the general workforce. In addition, family members who learn better ways to engage with the person in their lives with the disease become less stressed and more engaged.

Here are some reasons for employers to take an active role in addressing this challenge:



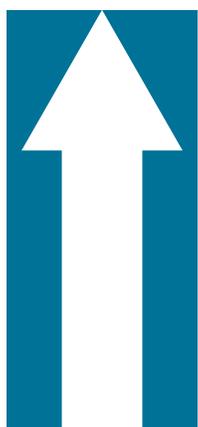
Increased Health Care Costs

Employers are taking notice of out-of-network treatment costs and prescriptions related to opioids. In addition, hospital emergency services and overall health care use are increased among those suffering from addiction – and loved ones frequently report being under debilitating stress. The health care costs for workers misusing pain medication are three times greater than the average employee, and those workers are twice as likely to have been hospitalized in the past year. Moreover, addiction doesn't only affect the employee – employers are also bearing the costs associated with family members.



Increased Turnover

Attracting and retaining qualified workers is a growing challenge across industries. Addiction can play a significant role in company turnover for both those with the disease as well as loved ones. Time spent recruiting and training new employees is a significant drain on personnel and resources. Studies have found it costs an average of six to nine month's salary every time a business replaces a salaried employee. By addressing addiction proactively among their workforce, employers can minimize the impact of the tight labor market on their business.



Increased Risk

Companies can't afford the liability associated with an employee with a substance use problem. When it comes to safety, rates of workplace accidents, injuries and even fatalities are all higher when addiction is present. In addition, companies face significant liability when an employee under the influence acts inappropriately at a company event, drives a company vehicle or has bad conduct in the workplace.

TAKING AIM AT ADDICTION:

Six steps for employers

As an employer, there are steps you can take to help your employees and their loved ones get well, improve productivity and reduce costs and risks related to addiction.

1

Focus on loved ones.

For every person with addiction, many others in their immediate circle are heavily burdened with its effects. This is probably the single largest impact on employers due to the sheer number of people and the consequences on productivity and absenteeism in the workplace. Employers committed to addressing addiction need to send the message to their team members that an open dialogue on these issues, and their impact on family members, is a company priority. In addition, look to your benefits providers and verify the support they offer extends to family members as well.

2

Ensure clear and consistent workplace policies.

Review your policies and procedures to determine if they're proactive and aligned with a supportive approach to addiction wellness. For example, if your company utilizes drug testing, consider alternatives to automatic dismissal the first time an employee tests positive. It might be more effective to offer an employee treatment, peer coaching or counseling as a mandatory alternative to termination. Other areas worth reviewing are your disability or leave policies for inpatient addiction treatment and the option to take time off to care for family members who may be impacted by the disease.

3

Offer access to high-quality, long-term support.

When it comes to overcoming addiction, a connection to effective, long-term support is the best predictor of recovery success. Addiction needs to be treated as a chronic disease, not something that can be cured in 30 days. Many employers offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) and cover addiction treatment as part of their health insurance plans, but these are usually short-term in nature. A more comprehensive approach would include an option for extended support such as peer coaching. This type of support is more flexible and less disruptive to work and family life, and when delivered over the long-term, can help those affected develop the skills to successfully manage the disease over a lifetime.

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4

Partner effectively with your benefits providers.

Your health insurance provider, EAP and other benefits providers need to be at the table with you. They should understand your company's commitment to supporting employees impacted by addiction and ensure their offerings are in sync with that approach. Be sure to review your coverage of addiction care, including medication-assisted treatment for opioid addiction. In addition, ask your EAP to provide information about their referral process and make sure the treatment programs in their network can demonstrate positive outcomes.

5

Commit to communication.

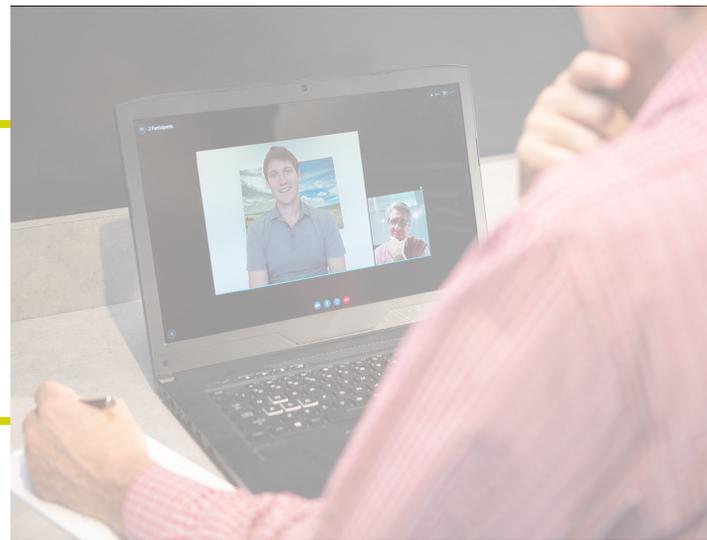
Motivating affected employees to seek help for addiction is not a "one and done" effort. It will take consistent, repeated messages in a number of forums to begin making inroads. Consider a mix of approaches including CEO videos, direct mail, safety talks, lunch-n-learns and even mobile messaging to lay the groundwork for success. Your employees need to hear the message from people at all levels of your company.

6

Champion culture change.

Stigma is a powerful deterrent to seeking help, and many people fear repercussions at work. The goal is to create a culture where your employees rally in support when someone is affected by addiction, just as if they were facing cancer or another serious illness. The leadership at the top sets the tone. The CEO and other senior managers should send the message that addiction is health issue, getting help is OK and there's no shame in seeking support.

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INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS: Facing it better, together



There are a number of new tools available to help employers better address the impact of addiction in the workplace. In the FIT @ Work program, Face It TOGETHER partners with employers by providing effective, science-based peer coaching for addiction to employees and their family members.

Face It TOGETHER has partnered with a number of Colorado companies in a wide range of industries, including GE Johnson Construction Company, Red Robin, Encore Electric, the Daniels Fund and the Intermountain Rural Electric Association.

GEJOHNSON

Kasia King, executive director of human resources for GE Johnson Construction Company, shares the company's experience with the program.



What problem(s) were you trying to solve by bringing FIT @ Work to GE Johnson?

A: In our quest to be a top employer we wanted proactive, outcomes-based tools and resources that would help our employees and their entire families with the disease of addiction.



What were the initial concerns you had about the program and how did you overcome those?

A: Privacy was a concern, and Face It TOGETHER's assurances of HIPAA compliance and confidentiality were compelling. As an employer, we get reports of progress and participation without any personal details. FIT also helped us communicate the confidentiality to our employees so they are more likely to use it if they need it.



How is FIT's coaching different from addiction treatment and other support already covered by a health plan and EAP?

A: FIT's coaching fills an important gap by providing high-quality, long-term support. EAPs tend to have a short-term focus and they are not specialists in addiction. There is overwhelming research showing that people do best in recovery when they're connected to long-term help. Our health plan covers clinical treatment, but that is also time-limited and it can be really disruptive to someone's life if they need to go away for 30 days. FIT's coaching is flexible and convenient and doesn't interfere with someone's home or work life.



Describe how FIT @ Work was rolled out to your company.

A: The people at FIT were willing to supply any tools or resources we needed to be effective for our culture. We developed a rollout strategy specific to our workforce that was simple and easy to activate. Most importantly for us, our senior leadership team was behind the program and strong supporters of the rollout process.



What challenges does addiction present to your company and to the construction industry more generally?

A: We've seen firsthand how addiction can affect our employees and our team. The disease – even a family member's addiction – has a direct impact on a person's ability to be their best at work. It affects our company and the construction industry in many ways – from our ability to maintain our team members' safety to higher health care and related costs.



How does FIT @ Work align with your company culture?

A: This program is a great fit for us. We value relationships, and as company we've always treated our team members as family. FIT @ Work helps us demonstrate care for our employees by getting them effective help for this serious issue in a confidential and meaningful way.



What has surprised you most about partnering with FIT?

A: FIT is so accommodating in meeting our needs as an organization. They do what is best for our culture and our team by not rolling out a pre-determined, cookie-cutter program. They are also a problem-solving partner; they come to the table to help us when we have questions.



What impact has FIT @ Work had at GE Johnson?

A: FIT @ Work has brought an opportunity for us to educate our employees on the impact addiction can have at work and at home. It reiterates our commitment to the wellbeing of our employees and their families and provides them tools for success.

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO FACE IT TOGETHER

To learn more about how Face It TOGETHER @ Work can help your employees – while providing a strong return on investment to your company – [visit **wefaceittogether.org/for-employers**](https://wefaceittogether.org/for-employers).

Face It TOGETHER partners with employers to address the impact of addiction in their companies, providing effective, science-based peer coaching for addiction to employees and their family members. Established in 2009, Face It TOGETHER is headquartered in Denver and offers coaching nationwide through their mobile app.

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