



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada



Canadian Centre  
on Substance Abuse  
Centre canadien de lutte  
contre les toxicomanies

Partnership. Knowledge. Change.  
Collaboration. Connaissance. Changement.



The Conference Board of Canada  
Le Conference Board du Canada

# Start the Conversation

## Problematic Substance Use and the Workplace



# Did You Know?

The use of alcohol and drugs can affect employees in any industry and at any job level.

Employers have a responsibility to prevent, reduce and address problematic substance use.

There is a strong link between problematic substance use and mental health.



8 OUT OF 10

Canadians aged 15 years and older drank alcohol in the past year

TOP 3



substances used by Canadians are:  
1 Alcohol 2 Cannabis 3 Opioid Pain Medication



1 IN 25

Canadians aged 15 years and older met the criteria for a substance use disorder

2x



People with a mental illness are twice as likely to have a substance use problem<sup>1</sup>



\$11.8B

Nationally, the cost of lost productivity due to illicit drug use

16%



of benefits costs are due to workplace disability and casual absence

<sup>1</sup>Rush et al (2008). Prevalence of co-occurring substance use and other mental disorders in the Canadian population

# Workplace Risk Factors for Substance Use

- Easy access to alcohol and other drugs
- High stress
- Boredom and repetitive duties
- Isolation
- Fatigue
- Low job satisfaction
- Long hours
- Shift work
- Remote or irregular supervision
- Negative work environment
- Lack of opportunity for promotion
- Meetings with clients or staff involving alcohol



## The Substance Use Spectrum

We often think of substance use in terms of addiction or dependence, but the use of alcohol and other drugs can fall anywhere on a spectrum and, at any point, may impact workplace performance and safety.

### Recreational use

An employee whose work includes meeting with clients at conferences and social events may prefer not to drink alcohol when discussing business, but will sometimes enjoy a glass of wine with dinner.

### Frequent use

An employee with a history of anxiety is going through a hard time at work and, to cope with the stress and lack of sleep, begins to use cannabis regularly. Usually a high performer, the employee begins to arrive late for work and misses a major deadline.

### Problematic use

An employee begins to use more pain medication than prescribed, which leads to conflicts with co-workers, incomplete assignments, and nearly causing a serious accident. Cutting back on the medication also proves difficult.

# Take Action Now

Everyone has a role, whether you are an employee, manager, human resource professional, union representative or executive leader. As an employer, here are some ideas to get started:

1

## Review your data

Use your organization's existing data to better understand the scope of the issue in your workplace.

2

## Involve employees and unions

Seek ideas and input. Truly engage staff and unions as they have insight and experience on how to achieve a healthy workplace.

3

## Raise awareness

Make information about problematic substance use available and accessible.

Provide prevention and resilience building programs.

4

## Reduce stigma and discrimination

Create an environment where employees can seek assistance without fear by speaking openly about substance use issues.

5

## Leadership commitment

Communicate about available supports. Leadership should be visible and sustained.

6

## Foster a healthy and safe environment

Create or enhance, and communicate, policies and processes related to substance use.

Develop an alcohol and drug policy tailored to your workplace's culture and specific needs.

7

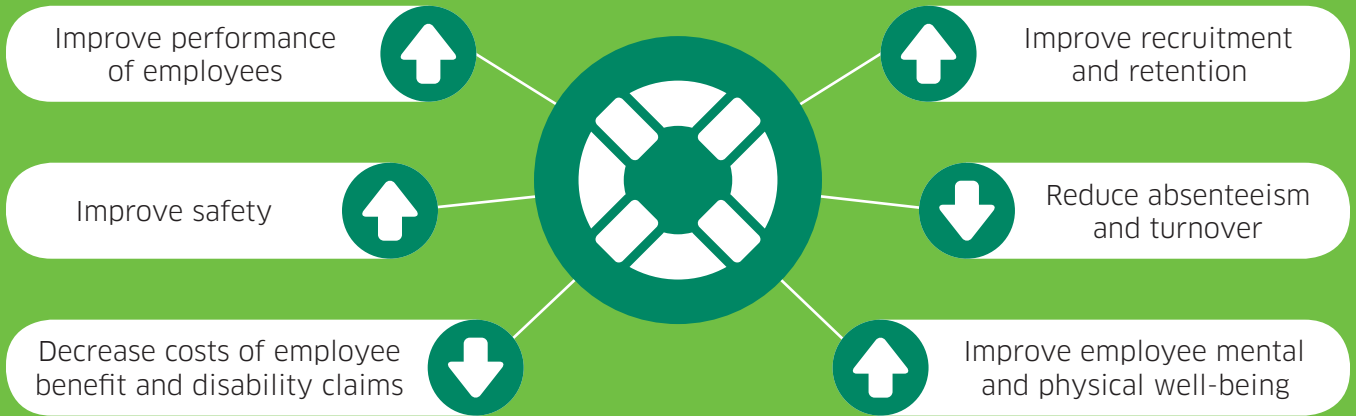
## Encourage early treatment and support

Provide information on where to get support and services (e.g., EAP, EFAP).

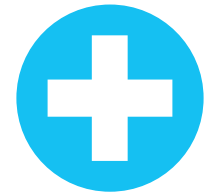
Support employees requiring assistance.

# Why It Matters

Employers who address substance use issues can:



## Free Resources



A step-by-step guide to addressing problematic substance use:

<https://www.gnb.ca/0378/acca/pdf/ACCA-Toolkit-English.pdf>

To create a mentally healthy workplace, implement the *National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace*: <http://csa.ca/z1003>

The *CCSA's Low Risk Drinking Guidelines* help moderate alcohol consumption and reduce immediate and long-term harms associated with it:

<http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/topics/alcohol/drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx>

Information on alcohol and drug abuse in the workplace:

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=6590>

A user-friendly guide to working together on health issues in the workplace, "Accommodation Works!"

Canadian Human Rights Commission: <http://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/eng/content/accommodation-works>



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