



Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace

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Summary of Session

Objectives:

- Learn the **essential components** of a Recovery Friendly Workplace
- Identify substance use disorder (SUD) **symptoms** and what SUD **recovery** can look like
- Explore the **risks and hazards** faced by healthcare professionals
- Learn ways to **reduce stigma** in the healthcare sector and promote **healthy recovery** for employees
- Learn how your business/organization can **become a RFW** in Montana



What is a Recovery Friendly Workplace?

A Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) is an environment where employers actively support employees recovering from substance use disorders (SUDs) and mental health challenges, promoting health, wellness, and productivity. These workplaces recognize recovery as a strength and foster a culture of inclusion, support, and opportunity.

– *National Recovery Friendly Workplace Institute*



History of RFW

Launched in March of 2018 in New Hampshire

- **Encourages** employee retention and productivity
- **Promotes** health, safety, and wellness for workplaces and employees
- **Aims** to reduce stigma
- **Empowers** workplaces to provide support for employees in recovery and those impacted by substance use disorders



The Need for Recovery Friendly Workplaces

People spend the bulk of their time at work

1 of 6 individuals meets the criteria for an SUD¹

1 of 3 individuals are *affected* by SUDs²

14M U.S. employees working full-time are in recovery³

Substance use costs the U.S. over **\$740B** annually⁴



Economic Impact

The economic impact of addiction can be quantified in terms of direct and indirect costs:

Direct costs include:

- medical care
- criminal justice
- social services

Indirect costs reflect:

- lost productivity
- absenteeism
- premature deaths



Essential Components of a RFW



Essential Components of a RFW

- Leadership Commitment
- Supportive Workplace Policies
- Education and Training
- Access to Treatment and
Recovery Resources



Essential components of a RFW

- Peer Support and Recovery Culture
- Workplace Flexibility
- Safe and Healthy Work Environment
- Ongoing Evaluation and Improvement



Essential components of a RFW

Bottom line

An RFW works when it combines **policy, culture, and access to support**—not just one or two elements. If any piece is missing (especially leadership support or real access to treatment), the whole system becomes less effective.



Substance Use Disorder Symptoms

11 diagnostic criteria in four major categories:

- **Impaired Control**

- Taking larger amounts
- Persistent desire to cut down
- Time spent
- Cravings

- **Risky Use**

- Physical Danger
- Knowing Harm

- **Social Impairment**

- Neglecting obligations
- Relationship issues
- Giving up activities

- **Pharmacological Dependence**

- Tolerance
- Withdrawal



Substance Use Disorder Symptoms

Severity is determined by the number of symptoms experienced within a 12-month period:

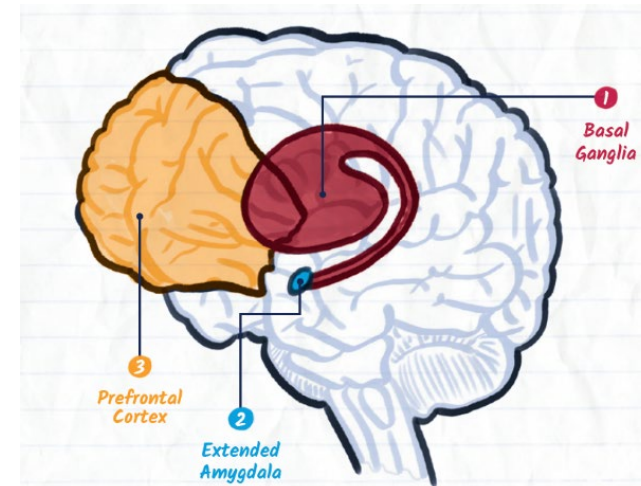
- **Mild:** 2 to 3 symptoms
- **Moderate:** 4 to 5 symptoms
- **Severe:** 6 or more symptoms

Addiction usually refers to the most severe form of SUD



Substance Use Disorder

- ▶ Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a **MEDICAL CONDITION**, as designated by the American Medical Association in 1987. **It is not a moral failing.**
- ▶ SUD changes normal desires and priorities. It can interfere with the ability to work, go to school, and to have good relationships with friends and family.
- ▶ Addiction is defined as a chronic, relapsing disease characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite adverse consequences.
It is considered a brain disorder, because it involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress, and self-control.



Treatment and Recovery

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE!

Addiction IS a treatable disorder.

“Like treatment for other chronic diseases such as heart disease or asthma, addiction treatment is not a cure, but a way of managing the condition” – NIDA



Understanding Recovery

Many Paths to Recovery

The pathways of recovery can look different for each employee and may include professional clinical treatment, use of medications, support from family and friends, faith-based approaches, peer support, and other methods. The following list highlights common pathways to recovery that when supported by employers, increases the opportunity for healthy and productive employees:

**Managed Use
Model or
Harm
Reduction**

**Medication
for
Addiction
Treatment
(MAT)**

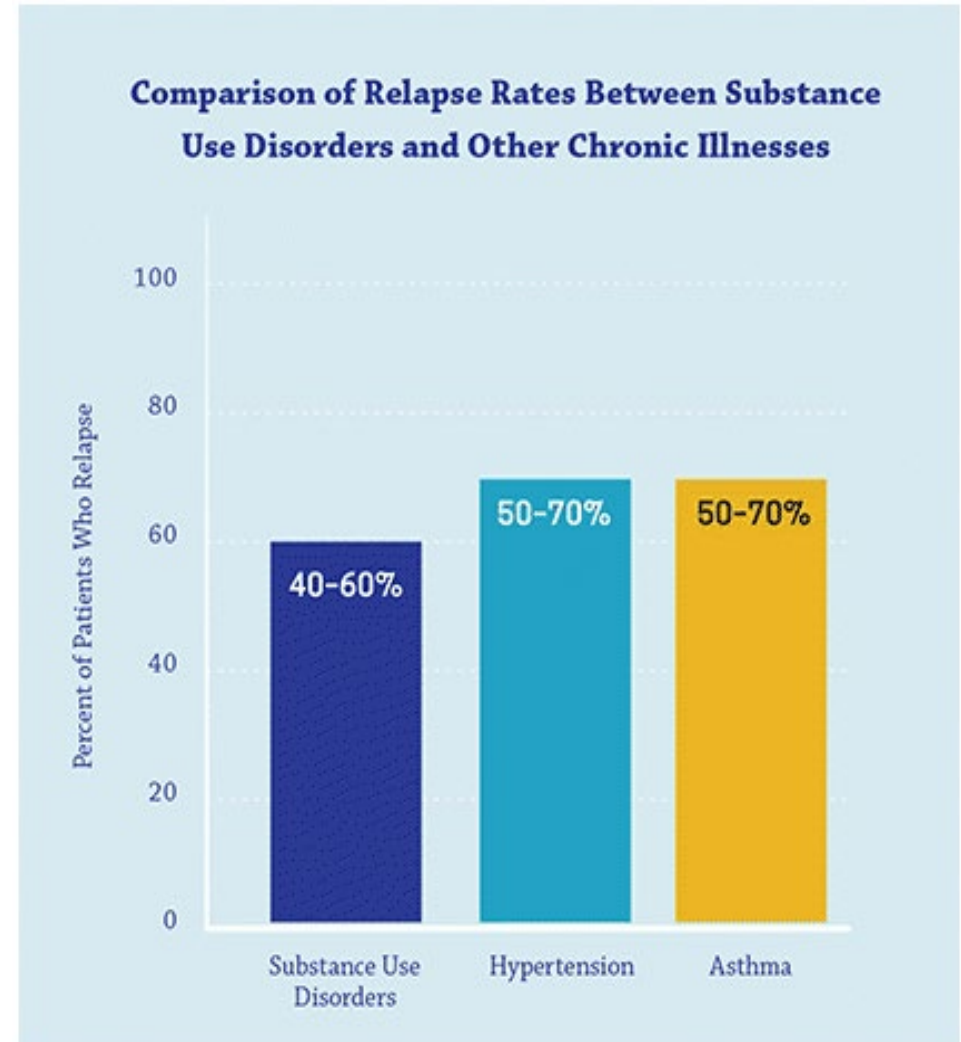
**Mental Health
Services
—
Natural
Change**

**Peer-Based
Recovery
Support
Services**

**Treatment
Resources**

Treatment and Recovery

The chronic nature of addiction means that for some people *relapse*, or a return to drug use after an attempt to stop, can be part of the process, but newer treatments are designed to help with relapse prevention. Relapse rates for drug use are similar to rates for other chronic medical illnesses. If people stop following their medical treatment plan, they are likely to relapse.



Recovery in Healthcare

The unique risks and hazards faced by medical professionals include:

Occupational Hazards and Root Causes

- Easy Access to Medications
- Extreme Burnout and Trauma
- Invincibility Bias & Knowledge
- Perfectionist Culture



Recovery in Healthcare

The unique risks and hazards faced by medical professionals include:

Direct Consequences

- Patient Safety Risks
- Severe Health and Fatal Risks
- Career Destruction
- Personal & Financial Ruin



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare

1. Adopt Person-First & Science-Based Language

The way healthcare professionals speak about substance use directly impacts both colleague recovery and patient care.

- **Avoid terms like** "addict," "abuse," "clean," or "dirty."
- **Use person-first terminology:** Use phrases like "person with a substance use disorder" (SUD) or "person in recovery".
- **Resource:** Review the [CDC Stigma Reduction](#) guidelines for a full breakdown of non-stigmatizing, medically accurate language



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare

2. Ensure Confidentiality and Supportive HR Policies

Fear of professional licensure retaliation and workplace gossip are major barriers to employees seeking help.

- **Strict privacy**: Ensure that seeking treatment through Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) is kept strictly confidential and separated from standard disciplinary tracks.
- **Non-punitive leave**: Offer flexible leave policies and return-to-work agreements that prioritize healthy recovery over termination.



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare

3. Implement Clinically Validated Education

Education replaces moral judgment with an understanding of addiction as a treatable brain disease.

- **Manager training:** Train leadership and HR teams to spot early signs of distress, handle sensitive conversations, and make formal management referrals without bias.
- **Universal training:** Require ongoing, evidence-based stigma-reduction training for all staff to address implicit bias.
- **Resource:** Organizations can implement self-paced educational programs like the Just Five platform to increase awareness



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare

4. Promote a Culture of Recovery

- **Evaluate workplace norms:** Shift social events away from environments centered on alcohol (e.g., after-work drinks) to avoid marginalizing employees in recovery.
- **Peer support:** Utilize trained peer coaches and support groups to help employees navigate the healthcare field while maintaining their recovery.
- **Resource:** Connect to peer resources and recovery-friendly workplace tools through the [U.S. Department of Labor Recovery-Ready Workplace Hub](#) or Montana's Recovery Friendly Workplace initiative.



Substance Use Stigma in Healthcare

By implementing comprehensive stigma awareness training for all staff members, organizations can create environments where individuals feel safe seeking treatment.



Resources for Healthcare

If you or a colleague are struggling, specialized resources provide confidential help and monitoring:

- [American Association of Nurse Anesthetists \(AANA\)](#): Provides support, peer support networks, and fitness-for-duty resources for nurse anesthetists.
- [StartYourRecovery.org](#): Offers tailored resources, helplines, and recovery pathways specifically designed for healthcare workers.
- [State Physician and Nurse Health Programs](#): Most state medical and nursing boards operate confidential, non-disciplinary monitoring programs that facilitate rehabilitation and licensure retention.



RFW Webinar re: Healthcare

 HEALTH LINKS

The Recovery Friendly Workplace: 2025

 September 17, 2025

 11AM-12PM MT

 Zoom webinar

 HEALTH LINKS

Speakers



Bill Hamel II
Hamel Dentistry



Kristin Waite-Labott
Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurs

 **David Shapiro**



 HEALTH LINKS

Keynote



JK Costello
The Steadman Group

 **David Shapiro**



How Businesses Benefit from being a RFW



How Businesses Benefit from being a RFW

- Stronger Workforce Performance and Retention
- Lower Healthcare and Safety Costs
- Improved Workplace Culture and Morale
- Expanded Talent Pool
- Access to External Resources and Partnerships
- Training and Education Opportunities
- Reduced Legal and Compliance Risk



→ Stronger Reputation and Community Standing

How Businesses Benefit

The Bottom Line

Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace is one of those cases where doing the right thing and doing the smart business thing align:

- Employees get a real path to stability and growth
- Employers get a more reliable, engaged, and sustainable workforce



Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace

Compassionate Support and Resources:

- Provide support through a non-judgmental atmosphere
- Promote health and well-being
- Provide access to resources



Credit: Chanintorn.v - stock.adobe.com



What is a Recovery Friendly Workplace?

Education and Awareness:

- Free substance use and recovery-related trainings
 - Just Five education modules
 - Overdose Prevention & Response
 - Reducing Stigma in the Workplace
 - Talk Saves Lives (Workplace Ed.)
- Awareness newsletters, events
 - National Recovery Month
 - Stress During the Holidays
 - Alcohol Awareness Month



<https://www.simplilearn.com/benefits-of-employee-training-and-development-article>



Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace?

Participating in the Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative does not require any out-of-pocket expenses!

Consultation and Technical Assistance = **No Cost**

Access to Community Resources = **No Cost**

Trainings and Education Resources = **No Cost**



Becoming a Recovery Friendly Workplace

Steps to becoming a RFW

1. Connect with RFMT
2. Submit a Letter of Intent
3. Complete Orientation & Initial Training
4. Create Declaration Statement
5. Receive RFW Designation



Billings

Beautiful Directions Counseling
Best Western ClockTower Inn
Billings Hotel & Convention Center
Community Crisis Center
Community Medical Services
Healing Rock Recovery
Rimrock Foundation
Stella's Bakery & Restaurant
STEP Inc.
SureStay Plus by Best Western
United Way of Yellowstone County
Veterans Navigation Network

Butte

Beautiful Minds Recovery
Butte Native Wellness Center
Butte Rescue Mission
L'Asist Behavioral Health

Deer Lodge/Drummond

DinoMart
Fic's (Drummond)
Fic's Plaza
Golden Spike Casino
Indian Creek Campground



Flathead/Mission Valley

Montana Coffee Traders
Never Alone Recovery Support Services
Recovery Centers of Montana
Rocky Mountain Twist

Helena

**DPHHS, Disability Employment
Transitions Division
DoubleTree by Hilton
Lewis & Clark Public Health
PureView Health Center
St. Peter's Health
YWCA Helena

Great Falls

Alliance For Youth
Breaking Chains for Recovery
Dynamic Recovery

Missoula

Beautiful Minds Recovery
Community Medical Services
Crosswinds Recovery
Daily's Premium Meats
Fourth D Club
Home ReSource
Hope Rescue Mission
**Ideal Option
LBM Concrete
Missoula Food Bank & Community Center
Missoula Interfaith Collaborative
Montana Two Spirit Society
Mountain Home Montana
Pattee Creek Market
Poverello Center
Stepping Stones Behavioral Health Services
The Center (Western MT Community Center)
United Way of Missoula County
Winds of Change
YWCA Missoula

***denotes multiple locations*



HealthLinks Webinar



RFMT Website

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