

Insight

An e-newsletter for supervisors and managers from your Aurora Employee Assistance Program

A word from the Aurora EAP

Prescription and illicit opioids have dominated the news in recent years. Opioid overdoses have claimed the lives of beloved celebrities and entertainers, while heroin has become increasingly commonplace in high schools throughout the country. The opioid epidemic has become so prevalent and widespread that the president has declared it a national emergency. This issue of Insight will discuss the impact of opioid use, and how it affects the workplace.

Opioids in the US: the New Drug Epidemic

The impact of opioid use in the US has become one of the most devastating and impactful health concerns in recent history, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. **With approximately 115 Americans dying from opioid overdoses every day**, the misuse of and addiction to opioids, which include prescription pain medication, heroin and other synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, has taken a serious social and economic toll on the US. In fact, it is estimated that the financial burden of opioid use exceeds \$78.5 billion annually due to lost productivity, increased health care claims, addiction treatment expenses, and added burden on the criminal justice system. To fully understand the breadth and scope of opioid use in America, consider the following statistics:

- **Roughly 21 to 29 percent of patients prescribed opioids for chronic pain misuse them.**
- **Between 8 and 12 percent develop an opioid use disorder.**
- **An estimated 4 to 6 percent who misuse prescription opioids transition to heroin.**
- **About 80 percent of people who use heroin first misused prescription opioids.**

Opioids in the Workplace: What to Look For

With the prevalence of opioids growing every year, it is critical that employers are aware of not only the dangers of opioid use in the workplace, but also the signs and symptoms of employees who may be misusing or abusing opioids. After all, it is estimated that over 75% of people with substance abuse disorders are employed; it would therefore only stand to reason that their addictions can spill over into the workplace. The following are several of the physical and behavioral symptoms commonly associated with opioid use :

- Noticeable elation/euphoria
- Marked sedation/drowsiness
- Confusion
- Constricted pupils
- Slowed breathing
- Intermittent nodding off, or loss of consciousness
- Shifting or dramatically changing moods
- Extra pill bottles turning up in the trash
- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Sudden financial problems

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While the aforementioned symptoms may indicate opioid use and abuse, the following symptoms and behaviors may be indicative of opioid withdrawal:

- Headache
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sweating
- Fatigue
- Anxiety
- Inability to sleep

Isolated occurrences of the preceding symptoms are not necessarily the result of opioid abuse or addiction, however, repeated occurrences of multiple symptoms may be cause for concern.

Combatting Opioids in the Workplace: Steps to Take

Awareness of opioid addiction is only half the battle. **In the workplace, it is important to have sound strategy in place to address and resolve issues surrounding drug and alcohol abuse.** To ensure the safety of your employees, consider the following strategies: :



- **Implement a standardized drug and alcohol policy,** and incorporate it into the employee handbook.
- **Standardize various methods of drug testing,** including: pre-employment, reasonable suspicion, post-accident, and random.
- **Educate your leadership on what to look for.** Conduct reasonable suspicion trainings on a regular basis for management and supervisors.
- **Know your resources and use them!** Engage your EAP professionals, as well as other free referral services such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) national hotline.



Your EAP can be your greatest resource for tackling opioid-related challenges in the workplace.

Did you know?

Not only can employees receive free and confidential assessments for drug and alcohol addiction, but your dedicated EAP account executive can also assist with:

- Facilitating onsite reasonable suspicion trainings for managers
- Assisting with drug and alcohol policies
- Administering mandatory EAP referrals for employees with drug and alcohol issues
- Providing access to free national and community-based resources for drug addiction

¹National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>

²<https://drugabuse.com/library/opiate-abuse/#signs-and-symptoms>

³<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>