



**Provide**  
employment supports



**Help employers**  
support those in recovery



**Develop**  
health care workforce

# THE ROLE OF THE WORKFORCE SYSTEM IN ADDRESSING THE OPIOID CRISIS:

## A RESOURCE GUIDE

**November 2021**

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**Submitted to:**

U.S. Department of Labor  
Chief Evaluation Office  
200 Constitution Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20210  
Project Officer: Jennifer Daley  
Contract Number: 1605DC-18-A-0020\1605DC-18-F-00404

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This project was funded by the Chief Evaluation Office of the U.S. Department of Labor under Contract #1605DC-18-A-0020\1605DC-18-F-00404. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Federal Government or the Department of Labor.

## Contents

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Resources related to employment supports for people in recovery..... | 1 |
| Resources for employers .....  | 3 |
| Resources to develop the behavioral health workforce .....           | 5 |
| References.....  | 9 |

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This guide, updated from the original version published in March 2020, provides resources to support the recipients of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) National Health Emergency (NHE) Dislocated Worker Grants, for demonstration projects and disaster recovery, as well as other interested parties, in their efforts to provide employment services to people affected by the opioid crisis, help employers address opioid use disorder in the workplace and support affected individuals, and develop the health care workforce to help address the opioid crisis.

The resources in this guide include relevant publications, websites, and interactive tools, as well as examples of programs being implemented across the country. It also includes resources developed by grantees through the NHE Dislocated Worker demonstration grants. In addition, this guide includes relevant background resources on opioid use disorder. This document complements a literature review, [\*The Role of the Workforce System and Employers in Addressing the Opioid Crisis: Lessons from the Literature\*](#) (Vine et al. 2020).

Resources in each topic area are grouped into two categories: (1) overview documents, which provide guidance and links to broad resources, and (2) program models, which provide examples of specific programs used in the field by practitioners.

## RESOURCES RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY

### Overview/guidance documents

- DOL’s Employment and Training Administration issued a [Training and Employment Notice](#) in July 2021, which provides information to state and local areas on the role of the public workforce system in addressing the economic and workforce impacts associated with the opioid crisis.
- DOL’s ETA WorkforceGPS technical assistance website also highlights [resources to assist in fighting the opioid epidemic](#), which includes links to fact sheets, technical assistance tools, case studies of effective responses to address the ongoing opioid crisis, and other resources to assist workforce development professionals.
- [Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education](#) is a resource guide from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) that provides an overview of issues, challenges, policies, and practices related to employment and workforce training for individuals in recovery from a substance use disorder. This comprehensive guide includes an evidence review of the effectiveness of employment supports for people with substance use disorder, examples of elements that improve program effectiveness, guidance to consider when selecting and implementing employment programs for people with substance use disorder, and resources for quality improvement and evaluation.

- A 2020 paper, [\*Building Evidence-Based Strategies to Improve Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Substance Use Disorders\*](#), examines the impetus and existing evidence on programs that integrate employment services with treatment and recovery services for people with opioid and other substance use disorders. This paper was developed under the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) project, which studies programs that combine employment services with treatment and recovery services for people with substance use disorders. BEES is funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families.
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health’s [\*Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder\*](#) provides guidance on the rights of individuals receiving medication-assisted treatment, including federal laws that protect individuals receiving medication-assisted treatment from job discrimination. Courts have ruled that receiving medication-assisted treatment suggests the presence of a disability, and thus, employers must provide “reasonable accommodations” to such employees, including restructuring jobs and modifying work schedules.
- SAMHSA’s Center for Substance Abuse Treatment has published a treatment improvement protocol on [\*Integrating Substance Abuse Treatment and Vocational Services\*](#). This document provides information on vocational screening, assessment, and readiness, and notes that substance abuse can qualify individuals to receive services from state vocational rehabilitation agencies funded by the U.S. Department of Education.
- DOL’s Employment and Training Administration has posted the recording of a webinar on [\*Implications of Substance/Opioid Misuse and Addiction for the Workforce Development System\*](#). This webinar includes a discussion of federal efforts to address this issue. It also introduces the Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) approach to delivering early intervention and treatment to people with substance use disorders and those at risk of developing these disorders.
- A brief developed for the Administration for Children and Families, [\*Opioid Use Disorder, Treatment, and Barriers to Employment Among TANF Recipients\*](#) (Germain 2018), summarizes the research on opioid use disorder and its negative effects on work readiness and employment attainment.
- A literature review conducted for the Department of Health and Human Service’s Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, [\*Housing Options for Recovery for Individuals with Opioid Use Disorder: A Literature Review\*](#) (Pfefferle et al. 2019), provides an overview of stable housing options for supporting successful recovery.



### Program models

- [\*Pathways to Employment: A Second Chance for Applicants Who Fail Pre-Employment Drug Screens\*](#) is a program started by Belden, an electronics company in Indiana. At Belden, applicants who are denied a job because of a positive drug test are offered the opportunity to

participate in a personalized drug rehabilitation program. If applicants complete the program, they can earn a position with the employer.

- DOL’s Employment and Training Administration highlighted Kentucky’s [Targeted Assessment Program](#) in a blog post. The Targeted Assessment Program uses comprehensive assessments to capture barriers to work among Temporary Assistance for Needy Families participants, including those with substance use disorders. The program also collaborates with other systems to engage these participants in evidence-based interventions.
- [Retrofit Careers](#) is an independently run recovery job board where individuals in recovery can post resumes and search listings, and employers can review resumes and post listings.
- Massachusetts’ [Access to Recovery – Career Building Initiative](#) (ATR-CBI) is a 3-week, 60-hour program co-developed by Massachusetts Career Centers and Advocates for Human Potential to address the unique barriers to employment that people with addiction issues face. CBI provides a specialized job readiness program and job search assistance to individuals in early recovery from substance use disorders who are participating in the ATR program. ATR is a 6-month program that supports recovery by providing many services in addition to CBI, such as care coordination, financial support for basic living needs (such as transportation and clothing), and individualized recovery coaching. The program reports that 2,400 participants have completed CBI and that participants were four times more likely to be employed at their 6-month disenrollment assessment than at intake.
- The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services developed [Strategies for Helping Individuals Impacted by Opioid Use Disorder: A Toolkit for Ohio’s Public Workforce System](#). This document is an example of the type of resource states could compile for local areas based on the literature on evidence-based practices and the particular circumstances of their state.

## RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS

### Overview/guidance documents

- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has developed a [framework](#) that highlights the role of the workplace in confronting the opioid crisis. The framework includes (1) identifying workplace conditions and education that workers might need about the risks of opioid use; (2) determining work-related risk factors for opioid use, such as injuries or stress; and (3) determining how to protect workers exposed to opioids and overdoses in the workplace.
- The Ohio Chamber of Commerce offers a [five-module course](#) that provides an overview of the legal and operational issues that employers should consider in responding to the opioid crisis, including developing a drug-free workplace policy and determining when and how to test employees for drug use.



- The National Safety Council (NSC) [Prescription Drug Employer Toolkit](#) provides resources to help employers proactively address the opioid epidemic, including considerations for developing employee assistance programs, conducting employee education, training supervisors, and developing policies on workplace drug testing. The NSC has also developed a document called [The Proactive Role Employers Can Take Opioids in the Workplace](#), which includes information on how to work with benefit providers, surveys current workplace drug testing policies, and discusses other workplace supports. Finally, the NSC has an online [Substance Use Cost Calculator for Employers](#), which allows employers to calculate the costs of substance use to their business.
- A 2009 report from the Employee Assistance Society of North America, entitled [Selecting and Strengthening Employee Assistance Programs: A Purchaser's Guide](#), provides information for employers to consider on types of services, delivery models, and pricing options.
- The National Business Group on Health has developed [An Employer's Guide to Workplace Substance Abuse Treatment: Strategies and Recommendations](#). This resource offers information about substance use disorders and practical solutions for addressing substance misuse among workers.
- The Boston Medical Center Grayken Center for Addiction's [employer resource library](#) includes 25 downloadable tools and resources on topics such as empowering and educating managers, supporting and engaging employees, and developing policies and practices.
- [The Opioid Crisis and Connecticut's Workforce: Updating Your Approach to Employees Suffering from Addiction Can Preserve Your Greatest Resource](#) is a white paper developed by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. It includes five key principles for employers—early identification, instant support, employer flexibility, regular review, and enlisting success—as well as links to employee resources.

### Program models

- Some states give a **recovery-friendly workplace** designation to employers that use approaches such as those described above to prevent substance use disorders and support employees during treatment and recovery. In 2018, New Hampshire (an NHE demonstration grantee) announced its [Governor's Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative](#), which encourages employers to foster a safe and healthy recovery environment, educate their employees on addiction and behavioral health prevention, implement evidence-based health and safety programming, and work with their community to promote prevention and recovery. Rhode Island (another NHE demonstration grantee) developed a [Recovery Friendly Workplace Initiative](#), using New Hampshire's initiative as a model. Rhode Island also developed a recovery-friendly [employer guide](#), which includes best practices to help employers support employees in recovery, including knowing how to recognize signs of substance use disorders and direct employees into treatment.



- The Kentucky Chamber Workforce Center recently launched the state’s [Opioid Response Program for Business](#), which will help employers audit existing drug-related policies and develop recovery-friendly policies.
- The [Federal Bonding Program](#) provides bonds that cover the first six months of employment for “at-risk,” hard-to-place job seekers, including individuals in recovery from substance use disorders. Employers receive these bonds for free as an incentive to hire these applicants, and the bond protects the employer against losses caused by any fraudulent or dishonest acts of the employee.
- In Rhode Island, Building Futures, a subgrantee under the NHE demonstration grant, developed an opioid education curriculum for the construction sector, which has been highly affected by the opioid epidemic. In addition to the training curriculum, Building Futures developed [resources](#) including Toolbox Talks, which are short training segments that can be delivered during a work break and cover topics such as prevention, helping a friend find treatment, supporting recovery, and Narcan and rescue training.
- Alaska (an NHE demonstration grantee) developed a toolkit for employers called [Addiction in the Workplace](#). This toolkit provides guidance and tools on designing workplace policies to support employees, legal issues pertaining to substance use in the workplace, considerations about health plan benefits, and approaches for discussing substance use with employees.

## RESOURCES TO DEVELOP THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

### Overview/guidance documents

- The University of Michigan’s [Behavioral Health Workforce Research Center](#) includes a repository of publications related to the behavioral health workforce, data visualizations to explore state-by-state characteristics of the behavioral health workforce, and materials from relevant past conference presentations.



### Program models

- The Health Resources and Services Administration funds a [behavioral health workforce and training program](#) that provides grants to professional training programs for the behavioral health workforce. Current grantees include accredited institutions of higher education, many of which are partnering with health centers to develop integrated care teams to address opioid use disorder and substance use disorders.
- SAMHSA supports training for the health care workforce through the [Providers Clinical Support System](#) (PCSS), which includes training on providing medication-assisted treatment. The PCSS includes trainings for primary care providers and other health care staff on identifying, preventing, and treating opioid use disorder. For example, the prescriber waiver

training program prepares providers to meet the requirements to prescribe buprenorphine. The PCSS also includes a mentoring program to answer health professionals' questions about treatment, and a new initiative that aims to increase organizations' capacity to integrate medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders in their settings.

- SAMHSA supports health care providers to [apply for a practitioner waiver](#) to prescribe or dispense buprenorphine, one of the three medications approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat opioid use disorder. SAMHSA's website also provides links to online trainings that physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and other providers can access in order to complete the training requirements needed to obtain a waiver.
- Through the NHE demonstration grant, Rhode Island developed [new registered apprenticeships](#) for occupations to address the opioid crisis. These included registered apprenticeships for Community Health Workers (CHWs) and for Peer Recovery Specialists (PRSs) who are dually certified as CHWs. Registered apprenticeship programs, an "earn while you learn" approach, can help build a certified workforce of CHWs and PRSs by providing classroom and on-the-job training.

## Background resources on opioid use disorder

- The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine released a comprehensive report in March 2019: [\*Medications for Opioid Use Disorder Save Lives\*](#). This report provides an overview of the medications used to treat opioid use disorder, the evidence base for their effectiveness, and common barriers to treatment.
- The Recovery Research Institute's [\*Addictionary\*](#) provides a list of terms and definitions of more than 200 words related to recovery and addiction. It highlights words that can be stigmatizing and offers potential alternatives. This resource can help clinicians and employers use appropriate language when discussing or talking to people with opioid use disorder. Other resources on using person-first language include [\*Words Matter—Terms to Use and Avoid When Talking About Addiction\*](#) and the [\*Addiction Language Guide\*](#).
- SAMHSA's [\*Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit\*](#) presents recommendations for developing policies and practices to help prevent opioid-related overdoses and deaths. These strategies may be relevant to health care providers, communities, and local governments.
- SAMHSA's [\*Decisions in Recovery\*](#) is an interactive tool for individuals with opioid use disorder. It provides information about the types of medications available to treat individuals with opioid use disorder and resources on recovery supports. SAMHSA has also published a [\*handbook\*](#) with guidance on using the web-based Decisions in Recovery tool.
- A toolkit from the American Hospital Association, called [\*Stem the Tide: Addressing the Opioid Epidemic\*](#), includes information on how health care systems and hospitals can respond to the opioid epidemic.

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