OPIOIDS IN THE WORKFORCE

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Based on Massachusetts Health Policy Forum Issue Brief by Heidi Sulman, Nancy Lane, Michael Doonan and Constance Horgan

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Devastating Impact of Opioid Epidemic

- Extent of the problem
- Current employer environment
- Five programs in Massachusetts
- Best practices and recommendations

Approach and Themes

**Approach:**
- Literature review
- 38 interviews with 7 key stakeholder groups

**Themes:**
- Employers’ uncertainty on how to address the epidemic in the workplace
- Need for tailored, workforce-specific solutions, promoted by leadership
- Prevalence of stigma: substance use disorders and medications for addiction treatment
Employers are concerned but:

- Are unsure about impact on their workforce
- Question whose responsibility it is
- Perceive that financial impact has been small
- Recognize that breadth of epidemic requires new ways to help workers remain in workforce

FACT: In 2016, 55% of persons with OUD were employed full time & 37% of non-elderly with OUD were covered by commercial insurance
Employers Report that Opioid Epidemic:

- Limits number of people able to work
- Contributes to absenteeism
- Leads to impaired or decreased job performance
- Impacts dependents

FACT: 50% of working age white men who were out of the labor force report chronic pain and daily use of opioid pain medications
Employers Vary In:

- Awareness of opioid and addiction issues
- Programming provided to employees and dependents
- Understanding of how their industry is impacted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACT:</th>
<th>Massachusetts Industry</th>
<th>Overdose Deaths (per 100,000)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>124.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agriculture/Fishing</td>
<td>107.5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>48.3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Average</td>
<td>25.1</td>
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Cost and Consequences are High

Employers face increased health care claims costs due to opioid use.

Cost of workers’ compensation claims also higher due to opioid use.

FACT: Large employer plans alone spent $2.6 billion on OUD related costs in 2016, an increase of nearly $2 billion or 307% since 2009.
Institute for Behavioral Health
SCHNEIDER INSTITUTES FOR HEALTH POLICY

Stigma Plays a Powerful Role in the Workplace

FACT: Almost all interviewees identified stigma and shame as a major barrier to success
### Employers are Developing Strategies

#### Offering services in the workplace

| Employee awareness programs and stigma reduction | Overdose prevention |

#### Adapting traditional health benefits to address opioids through insurers and benefit managers

| Limiting initial and high-dose exposure to opioids | Pain management programs | Minimizing/eliminating barriers to treatment | Increasing access & use of in-network providers | Supporting awareness and acceptance of MAT | Special attention to dependents |
Five Innovative Programs in MA

- Boston Medical Center
- Fishing Partnership Support Services
- Seafood Sam’s
- New England Carpenter’s Benefit Fund
- General Electric & GE Foundation
Innovation Themes

Key questions:

☐ How did they start?

☐ What does it take?

☐ What elements do they share?

Common elements:

☐ Strong leadership support

☐ Anti-stigma component

☐ Understanding of work and issues in organization or profession

☐ Aimed at human dilemmas of addiction & recovery
Boston Medical Center
*It Starts with Leadership and Analysis*

Leadership decision to focus on addiction issues of employees and families, as well as patients

BMC’s actions to address opioids:

- Raising awareness through employee story-telling and presentation
- Taking a pledge
- Analyzing the economic burden
- Understanding impact of SUDs & utilization of benefits
- Putting data into action
  - Benefit guide to behavioral health benefits
  - Promoting use of EAP
- Developing Employer Resource Library to help other employers
An Industry and its Workers Provide Integrated Prevention and Support for Recovery

Provides comprehensive support services for fishermen & their families

Services tailored to address issues of a hazardous occupation where workers are mostly independent contractors

Fishing Partnership’s actions that address opioids:

- Safety training
- Opioid awareness training
- Naloxone training
- Fishing Partnership Navigators
- Community and family outreach
- Opioid treatment tailored to meet the needs of fishermen
### Seafood Sam’s, a seasonal seafood restaurant in Falmouth

| Passionate advocate in recovery provides support for recovery in a local business | Employs many young people in early stages of recovery |

### What’s different at Seafood Sam’s?

| Real opportunity for non-stigmatizing recovery in the workplace – 1 out of 5 employees in recovery | Owner brings personal experience and understanding to situation | Employees held accountable for following recovery plans, given flexibility to attend treatment appointments | Advocates for better pain management education and supports MAT, abstinence-based treatment and recovery coaches | Provides longer-term employment and engagement for better outcomes – employees stay 5 years on average |
The New England Carpenters Benefit Fund (NECBF)

*Discovering and Encouraging the Best Treatments for Carpenters*

- Offers self-insured health benefits to 22,000 members and retirees
- With BCBSMA, learned prevalence of BH and SUD’s was much higher than other plans
- To address issues, NECBF:
  - Reduced low-quality out-of-network utilization and costs; decreased spending by over $1m/year
  - Increased access to care
  - Supports continuing care through Carpenters Assistance Program in-house EAP
  - Educates carpenters, families, stewards, and employers about addiction as a disease and availability of resources
$15m, multi-year commitment to expand treatment access for people with SUD

- Integrate evidence-based medication assisted treatment into primary care practices
- Reduce stigma

GE working to support employees and family members struggling with SUD’s, includes:

- Employees Raising Awareness events developed by GE aviation employees
  - Led to SUD support group led by employees w/ EAP
  - Event Toolkit now being shared with other GE sites
- Educating managers and employees
- Shatterproof Addiction Wellness at Work - online resource
- Expanding access through benefit changes
- Scaling up efforts across many international locations
Recommendations

1. Enhance employee benefits: offer intervention points and best practices
2. Add pharmacy benefit managers
3. Cover alternative pain management options
4. Identify and treat people with OUD
5. Cover medications for addiction treatment
6. Utilize Employee Assistance Programs
7. Be proactive with workers’ compensation and disability insurance
8. Help employers get started
9. Create opportunities to coordinate across public and private sectors
10. Tailor interventions to specific workplace needs
Employers Have a Unique Opportunity to Help Address the Opioid Crisis in Massachusetts

- Continue to implement and improve effective approaches to prevention, identification, and treatment of OUD
- Create workplaces free of stigma
- Support long-term recovery

THANK YOU!