

# Substance Misuse Prevention

## Background Information/Rationale for Focus

Of Canada's workers, 80 per cent are current drinkers and 6.5 - 22 per cent of these individuals admit to drinking at the workplace, or shortly before going to work<sup>1</sup>. The cost of substance use problems to Ontario workplaces is estimated at \$1.6 billion per year in lost productivity and the overall social cost of substance misuse in Canada in 2002 was estimated to be \$39.8 billion.<sup>2 3</sup>

Safety and performance are compromised when employees use alcohol and/ or drugs on the job. Workplace alcohol and drug use have been linked with a long list of problems that include:

- Tardiness, absenteeism, increased sick days
- Needless risk taking, unsafe work practices
- Productivity/ service problems
- Poor decision making
- Liability risks
- Workplace injuries
- Death
- Poor morale, frustration, stress, deteriorating work relationships and unhealthy work environment for co-workers
- Compensation claims, cost of replacing or repairing damaged property or equipment, theft and other crime, cost of replacing/ retaining employees and poor public relations for managers



### *A typical workplace of 1,000 employees:*

- \* Has a rate of alcoholism and excessive drinking in the neighbourhood of 10 – 20 per cent
- \* Has a rate of illicit drug use anywhere from 2 - 7 per cent

Current heavy drinkers and illicit drug users are more than twice as likely to have skipped one or more days of work in the past month.

Bellwood Health Services Inc. (2006) Economics of Addictions.

The implication of substance use is not limited to the workplace. Substance misuse can create stress and strain on family and the community at large.

## Goals For The Workplace To Strive For

1. To promote awareness of the risks associated with alcohol/ drug use.
2. To provide a supportive and safe work environment by reducing/ preventing potential harms associated with workplace alcohol/ drug misuse.
3. To encourage active and supportive communication between employers and employees and assisting staff to access available supports when needed without compromising confidentiality.

## Getting Started – Utilizing a Variety of Health Promotion Strategies

### Awareness Raising

- Utilize bulletin boards, displays and pay cheque inserts featuring resources related to substance abuse prevention (ie. post flyers, fact and tip sheets, to reduce alcohol/ drug related risks)
- Include short articles in an internal newsletter or staff emails (check websites e.g. and local newspaper for relevant articles)
- Dedicate an accessible area to display pamphlets and resources regarding low risk drinking guidelines, addictions counseling, etc
- Include Alcohol Policy in orientation process for new employees

### Skill Building

- Offer presentations/ workshops through “lunch and learn” sessions discussing issues of alcohol/ drug related risk, low risk drinking guidelines, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), alcohol related liability, mocktails (non alcoholic drinks), party planning, etc.
- Provide continuing education for management and employees on identifying potential workplace substance misuse

### Creating Supportive Environments

- Provide ongoing support for a workplace alcohol/ drug policy (i.e. encourage staff to identify issues and respond to concerns and answer questions);
- Implement EAP program and openly encourage employees to utilize this confidential service
- Offer incentive programs (i.e. self-help manuals, contests on Making the Best Mocktails)

## Creating Healthy Workplace Policy

- Develop and implement a workplace alcohol/ drug policy, involving all levels of staff
- Offer flex time/ flexible scheduling policies for personal leave or to attend counseling



Telephone consultation is available through **Project Health: 519-883-2287**

## Region of Waterloo Public Health Resources

Project Health has a number of resources available for planning, implementing and evaluating your workplace wellness activities. As well, we have a number of links to external resources that you may find helpful. Please see [www.projecthealth.ca](http://www.projecthealth.ca) for further resources on this topics area.

Also, the Public Health Resource Centre has a number of displays, educational kits, DVDs, posters, books, and pamphlets relevant to workplace health. Search for resources using the online catalogue. Or simply contact Resource Centre staff with your topic and they will suggest resources for you. Note that resources may be booked in advance.

For more information, click [here](#) (link to:

<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/DocID/1FB38293EBA4935785256B120060265E?OpenDocument>)

Phone: 519-883-2256

Email: [phrc@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:phrc@regionofwaterloo.ca)

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Single, E. (1998). *Substance Abuse and the Workplace in Canada*. Report prepared for Health Canada. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse.
- <sup>2</sup> Ontario Health Promotion E-Bulletin. (2001). Taking action on alcohol-related problems in the workplace: Lessons learned. *OHPE Bulletin, 2001*, 233. Retrieved from <http://www.ohpe.ca/node/154>
- <sup>3</sup> Rehm, J., Baliunas, D., Brochu, S., Fischer, B., Gnam, W., Patra, J., Popova, S., ... B. Taylor. (2006). *The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada 2002*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsa.ca/2006%20CCSA%20Documents/ccsa-011332-2006.pdf>

