

**Workers between 18 and 25 are an integral part of our dynamic and diverse workforce.** Helping these young employees develop healthy work habits and addressing issues that may affect their on-the-job performance can have a positive, long-lasting impact on an employer's bottom line. But when it comes to building a healthy, productive workforce, employers may overlook an area where they can be particularly influential: substance abuse.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- ✓ Savings to employers from investing in substance abuse treatment can exceed costs by a ratio of 12 to 1.<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ Substance abuse treatment improves work performance and productivity while reducing interpersonal conflicts, job turnover, drug- and alcohol-related accidents and insurance costs.<sup>2</sup>

## FAST FACTS

- ◆ Forty to 60 percent of all patients admitted to hospital trauma centers were injured while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.<sup>3</sup>
- ◆ Light and moderate alcohol users, higher in number than alcoholics, cause 60 percent of alcohol-related absenteeism, tardiness, and poor work quality.<sup>4</sup>
- ◆ Younger employees are more likely than older ones to work under the influence of alcohol or with a hangover.<sup>5</sup>

## Why Addressing Substance Abuse Matters

Drug and alcohol problems cost the nation an estimated \$276 billion a year, with most of the tab resulting from lost work productivity and avoidable healthcare costs.<sup>6</sup>

Because 76 percent of people with drug or alcohol problems are employed<sup>7</sup>—and given that replacing an employee costs from 25 to 200 percent of annual compensation<sup>8</sup>—employers have a major stake in addressing workers' substance use disorders.

Younger workers are more likely than their older counterparts to drink heavily, binge drink (see definitions in chart) and use illicit drugs.<sup>9</sup> These behaviors can lead to increased absenteeism, poor job performance, and increased accidents and injuries on the job.

Excessive drinking and drug use also can increase a person's risk of developing other serious health problems (e.g., heart disease, liver disease, certain types of cancer) down the road as well as exacerbate existing conditions such as diabetes or mental disorders.

## How Substance Abuse Costs Employers

Drug and alcohol abuse are costly to employers in a variety of ways:

### Increased healthcare costs

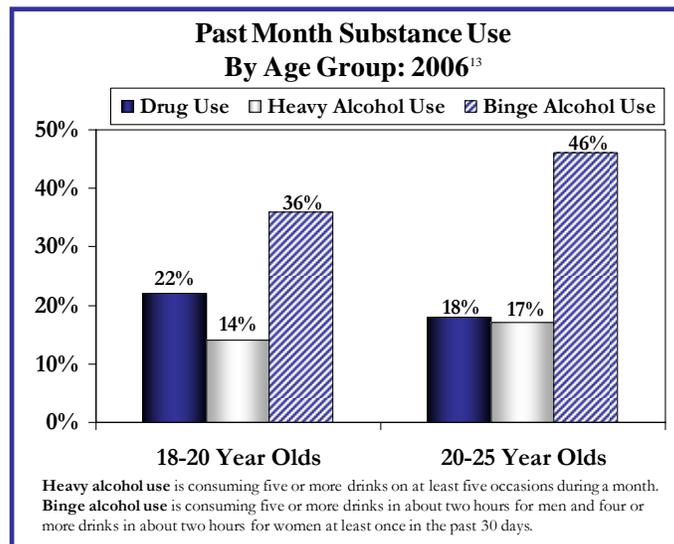
- ◆ Healthcare costs for employees with alcohol problems are twice those for other employees.<sup>10</sup>

### Higher risk

- ◆ People who abuse drugs or alcohol are three and a half times more likely to be involved in workplace accidents.<sup>11</sup>

### Reduced productivity

- ◆ Lost work productivity (including absenteeism and poor job performance) associated with substance abuse costs the nation an estimated \$197 billion a year.<sup>12</sup>



- ◆ Employees who drink heavily or use illicit drugs are significantly more likely to skip one or more days of work in a month.<sup>14</sup>

### **Increased turnover**

- ◆ People with drug or alcohol problems were more likely than others to report having worked for three or more employers in the previous year.<sup>15</sup>
- ◆ People under age 25 have higher rates of turnover than other employees.<sup>16</sup>

## **How Employers Can Help Younger Workers**

Employers can save money and retain valued employees by ensuring that workers with substance use problems get the help they need. It takes just a few crucial steps:

### **Educate, Prevent, Promote**

- ◆ Employee assistance programs (EAPs)\* or company wellness programs can help employers develop materials aimed at educating workers about the health and safety risks associated with drug and alcohol use and preventing substance abuse. In addition, these programs can
  - Have clinicians perform confidential screening to identify employees with substance use disorders;
  - Refer employees to appropriate treatment options; and
  - Provide support for persons in recovery.
- ◆ Be sure EAP or wellness providers understand the unique impact substance use disorders may have on younger workers and how to tailor communication about the effects of drug and alcohol abuse to this specific population.

### **Demand more of your health plan**

- ◆ Be sure that your health plan requires its physicians to screen all patients for substance use disorders.

### **Provide employees with comprehensive health plan benefits that support a broad range of services, including**

- ◆ Confidential substance abuse screening,\*\*
- ◆ Brief intervention,

\*Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) are designed to help identify and resolve productivity problems affecting employees who are impaired by personal concerns. EAPs come in many different forms, from telephone-based services to on-site programs. Face-to-face programs provide more comprehensive services for employees with substance use disorders, including screening, treatment referrals and follow-up care.

\*\*Confidential screening for substance use disorders by trained and experienced clinicians involves the use of standard protocols to determine whether an individual may be abusing substances. Screening identifies the need for, but does not substitute for, a complete assessment. Screening is not the same as drug testing that is done either prior to employment or randomly during the course of employment.

- ◆ Counseling and medical services, and
- ◆ Treatment follow-up services.

## **For More Information**

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)
- Drug-Free Workplace Program, <http://www.workplace.samhsa.gov/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse, [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>

## **References**

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