

# HELPING HAND

## What Employers Need to Know About Opioids

By Tom Schuman

Drug addiction is a “cunning, baffling and powerful disease.” But it is also “manageable,” as evidenced by 23 million Americans in long-term recovery.

Those are the words of Dana Simons, executive director of the Next Step Community faith-based residential and resource program in Terre Haute. Simons kicked off the inaugural Employer Opioid Strategy session being facilitated by the Indiana Workforce Recovery initiative.

The mission: Assist employers with helping their employees impacted by drug misuse and reduce the stigma associated with the opioid crisis. Upcoming convening sessions are taking place in Indianapolis, Plainfield, Lafayette, Greenwood and Bloomington.

Governor Eric Holcomb began aggressively attacking the opioid

epidemic his first day in office. Many important educational meetings have taken place. The Indiana Workforce Recovery employer strategy gatherings, however, are the first ones focused on the workplace. Local leaders and state experts offer information and guidance, including input on some of the many legal implications.

Richard Payonk, executive director at the United Way of the Wabash Valley, terms this a crucial topic for the business and social services communities. “We’re not the experts, but we can’t overlook this anymore. If we can make this community better for employees coming to work every day, that makes business better.”

### Continuing challenge

A snapshot of just some of the information shared in Terre Haute – and throughout each of the sessions.

- Katanna Royer, CVS pharmacist: Nationally, 62 people die each day of overdoses related to prescription opioids. One in four teens has misused or abused prescription opioids, and 70% of those 12 and older who abused prescription medications say they obtained the drugs from relatives or friends. Pharmacists can work with employers and medical professionals on controlling prescription abuse.

### Upcoming Employer Opioid Strategy Sessions

- Northeast Indianapolis, March 5
- Downtown Indianapolis, March 12
- Plainfield, March 19
- Lafayette, March 21
- Greenwood, April 3
- Bloomington, April 4

Additional details at [www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery](http://www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery)



Sharing knowledge and insights at the Terre Haute employer strategy session are (clockwise from left) Amy Adolay, Krieg DeVault; Richard Payonk, United Way of the Wabash Valley; and Kournaye Sturgeon, Overdose Lifeline. Resource materials are also available from state and local agencies.

- Amy Adolay, attorney with Krieg DeVault LLP, notes the complicated interplay of the Americans With Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave Act and more: “Confidentiality is probably the area where I see employers make the most mistakes.”

She emphasizes drug testing of applicants can only take place if it is required of all applicants in the same job category, as well as the importance of medical information being kept separate from employee personnel files.

- Tony Toomer, opioid treatment program (OTP) manager for the Family and Social Services Administration’s Division of Mental Health and Addiction: He outlines various treatment options and describes the expansion of the certified OTP centers in the state from 13 to 18 – with that number to grow to 25 by the end of 2019. The clinics are the only source for methadone treatment to help with stopping the symptoms of drug use withdrawal. Counseling and other supportive services are offered.

Toomer outlines four recovery goals: withdraw from the problem opioid, begin recovery, stay in recovery and live addiction-free.

### Employer perspective

Two of the various employer representatives in attendance in Terre Haute were simply looking to educate themselves on the issue.

Elizabeth Coleman, an HR generalist with Terre Haute Savings Bank, says she was surprised about the depth of drug use at such a young age. She hopes to be able to share portions of the presentations with her colleagues.

“It’s realizing this exceeds employees and includes family and friends,” she reveals. “I was just reading an article about a family and the uncle was impacted and he could hardly concentrate at work. The *Know the O Facts* (campaign) is important, knowing what to say and what not to say to people.”

Denise Smith has enjoyed a 30-year career at the Terre Haute operation of Ampacet, an international company focused on the future of plastics. In addition to gaining knowledge to use on the job, she wants to help ensure her two young grandchildren are as protected as possible.

“I’ve been saying for a long time that this is bigger than what people have been saying. This (event) is reinforcing that,” offers Smith, noting failed drug tests and distracted employees as among the impacts in the workplace. “It touches everybody; nobody is immune from it.”

### Ball in your court

Each Employer Opioid Strategy convening closes with practical guidance on the administration on Naloxone (commonly known as Narcan) in an overdose emergency. Kourtayne Sturgeon, education program director for Overdose Lifeline, also provides additional sobering statistics.

While 23 million people are in long-term recovery from drug misuse, she adds that 20 million more show symptoms of problems and that only one in 10 in need receive treatment. And, as a reminder about future dangers, four in five new heroin users started down that road by using prescription pain pills.

Treatment barriers, according to Sturgeon, are availability, high costs, lack of insurance and required travel time.

While state programs and other initiatives strive to address these obstacles, Simons, the Next Step Community leader, identifies three keys for long-term recovery:

- Stable housing (to help avoid stress)
- A job (providing purpose and meaning)
- People (good relationships)

Noting a waiting list for her organization’s residential program, she attests, “It’s always tragic when you can’t serve people serious about treating their addiction.”

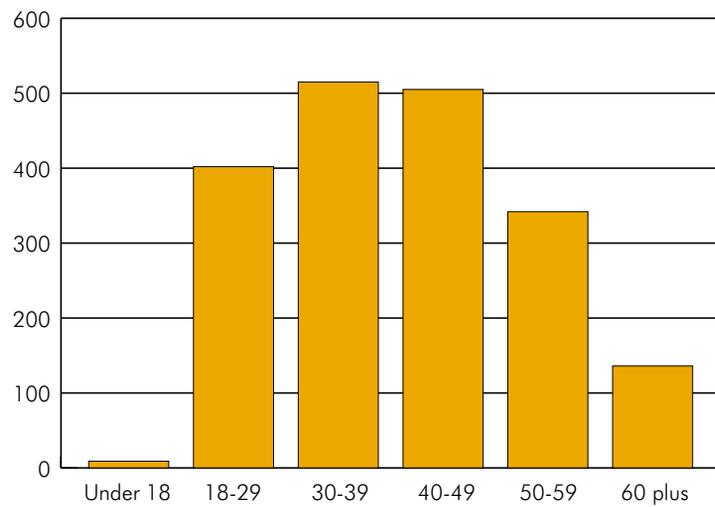
Employers, however, have the opportunity to be part of that solution.

Sturgeon cites recent research in which it was found employers have even more influence than family members when it comes to people seeking treatment.

Thus, the importance of Indiana Workforce Recovery and its mission to assist employers.

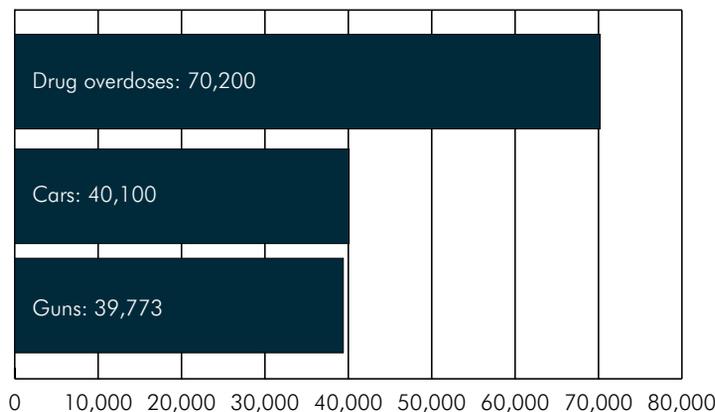
### Indiana Drug Overdoses in 2017

(by age group)



Source: Centers for Disease Control

### U.S. Accidental Deaths in 2017



Source: Indiana State Department of Health

### Top 5 Opioid Medications Dispensed in Indiana

(2018; quarter 3)

1. 45%: Acetaminophen and hydrocodone
2. 15%: Tramadol
3. 11%: Acetaminophen and oxycodone
4. 8%: Buprenorphine and naloxone
5. 5%: Oxycodone

Source: Indiana State Department of Health, Division of Trauma and Injury Prevention

**RESOURCE:** Indiana Workforce Recovery at [www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery](http://www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery)