

# SOBERING SURVEY

## Challenge in Place; Resources Available

By Charlee Beasor

To solve a problem, one must truly understand it.

When that challenge is substance abuse in Indiana workplaces, there is now first-of-its-kind data to help analyze the issue. The details are courtesy of Indiana Workforce Recovery (IWR), the initiative launched by the Indiana Chamber and the Wellness Council (WCI) of Indiana in 2018.

A survey, conducted in late 2018 and early 2019, offers a statewide examination of what employers are doing to help employees dealing with substance use disorder (SUD) or those who are in recovery. Nearly half of the 400,000 Hoosiers struggling with SUD and the 40,000 seeking treatment each year are employed.

Of the survey respondents, 76% indicate they believe drug and alcohol misuse is a problem within their community. But only 13% of respondents acknowledge it is a problem for their organization.

That imbalance is emphasized by just half of respondents indicating they have a plan in place to help employees seeking assistance.

“Which means 50% of employers do not (have a plan),” notes Jennifer Pferrer, WCI executive director. In addition to the survey results, the state has released new guidelines for employers to follow to properly assist employees and IWR has unveiled an accompanying video toolkit and additional resources.

### ‘We need to do better’

Survey results highlight the impact of substance misuse on employers. Almost half report increased employee absenteeism as a result of the disorders, along with decreased productivity and a shortage of workers.

Employee impacts – including family discord, arrest and property loss – are also emphasized. Up to 9% of employers reveal employees suffering non-fatal overdoses and 4% report fatal overdoses.



The Wellness Council of Indiana’s Jennifer Pferrer stresses the positive outcomes that result when employers help their team members gain needed treatment.

Pferrer: “Less than 6% (of employers) follow best practices when applicants test positive for drugs. With workforce shortages in our state, we need to do better than that. We know employer intervention is effective. Individuals that are referred to treatment by employers have better outcomes. They stay in treatment longer when an employer recommends treatment.”

Affordability and access to treatment is another survey topic. Less than half of organizations agree they have adequate health benefits for an employee’s drug or alcohol misuse needs.

Due to state efforts from the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) and the “Know the O” marketing campaign, Pferrer adds that 70% of employers understand that addiction is a chronic disease. And more than half believe treatment works for SUD.

But, she emphasizes that the current reality is that “Hoosiers who fail a drug screen for the first time are just as likely to be terminated as to be given a second chance and seek treatment.”

### Providing assistance

The framework to create state employer guidelines was passed in 2018 as part of House Enrolled Act 1007, or the Indiana Substance Use Treatment Law. The goal: To

incentivize and assist employers to create best practice policies and a second-chance program for applicants who would otherwise be qualified for potential employment but test positive on a drug screen.

Pferrer refers to the ongoing talent shortage impacting all sectors of the Indiana workforce and points to the second chance guidelines as a “partial solution” for employers struggling to find workers.

Eight employer opioid strategy events took place around the state earlier this year, funded in part by the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation. Rob Hillman, president of Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield in Indiana, refers to the opioid epidemic as “one of the most significant public health problems we’ve seen in our 75-year history.”

“The effects of this epidemic are felt throughout society,” Hillman says in a provided statement. “From babies born every 25 minutes suffering from opioid withdrawal to businesses having difficulty finding workers who can pass a drug test.”

Jim McClelland, Indiana executive director for drug prevention, treatment and enforcement, shares that feedback from the employer opioid strategy convenings – which included more than 350 employers participating – contributed to the development of the guidelines.

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## EMPLOYER IMPACTS

**48%** Absenteeism  
**37%** Decreased productivity  
**26%** Shortage of workers



## EMPLOYEE IMPACTS

**28%** Family discord  
**23%** Arrest  
**12%** Property loss



## IT'S A CONCERN

COMMUNITY PROBLEM:

**76%**  
strongly agree/agree

But ...

PROBLEM FOR MY ORGANIZATION:

**13%**  
strongly agree/agree

INDIANA EMPLOYEES TESTING POSITIVE FOR THE FIRST TIME ARE AS LIKELY TO BE TERMINATED (**21.5%**) AS GIVEN A SECOND CHANCE (**23.6%**)

## MEDICAL APPROACH



ADDICTION IS A DISEASE:

**71%**

TREATMENT WORKS:

**54%**

But ...

ORGANIZATION CAN SUPPORT EMPLOYEES IN RECOVERY:

**35%**

ORGANIZATION CAN POSITIVELY PREVENT MISUSE:

**16%**

## ORGANIZATIONS WITH ...

**65%**

Written misuse policy

**45%**

Plan to direct employees to assistance

**48%**

Use of pharmacy/claims data

**15%**

Annual drug-free supervisor training

**42%**

Adequate health benefits to assist employees

Data collection occurred electronically from November 2018 through February 2019. No responses identifying individuals or specific businesses were collected. Statistical significance was measured at a 95% confidence level.

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“Everyone understands that substance use in the workplace can be a problem. But there’s a big opportunity here. We know that businesses need a healthy workforce and we also know that people in recovery from a substance use disorder need jobs,” McClelland offers.

### ROI of recovery

Only one in three organizations responded in the IWR survey that their organization can support employees in recovery for drug or alcohol misuse.

Research shows, however, that treatment yields better sustained recovery when initiated by an employer. And the National Safety Council points to a one-year company cost savings of over \$3,200 for employees who recover from substance use disorder.

IWR Director Mike Thibideau speaks often of his personal story of recovery from alcohol and drug use. He emphasizes the impact of being employed during his treatment.

“My employer worked directly with me as I did five days of in-patient detoxification, 45 days of residential treatment and then from there as I transitioned into out-patient care. My employer allowed me to move back to 30 hours a week so that I was able to access the necessary services.”

Thibideau says he’s seen others successfully navigate treatment and recovery without being employed, but it’s much more difficult without that job stability.

“These guidelines will provide employers with the ability to navigate the treatment process to an even greater extent than my employer was able to do at the time. We’re going to help more people find recovery sooner and with more stability,” he concludes.

The survey results, including a one-page infographic summary (Page 45), guidelines and toolkit are all available at [www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery](http://www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery).



**RESOURCES:** Rob Hillman, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, at [www.anthem.com](http://www.anthem.com) | Jim McClelland, state of Indiana, at [www.in.gov/recovery](http://www.in.gov/recovery) | Jennifer Pferrer and Mike Thibideau, Wellness Council of Indiana, at [www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery](http://www.wellnessindiana.org/recovery)