SUPPORTS

A.10023/S.9145 (Steck/Fernandez)

An Act to Establish Workplace Programs to Prevent Addiction and Support Recovery in Employment

The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) supports the above-referenced legislation, which establishes a Recovery Ready Workplace Act to promote a safe working environment for individuals in recovery and prevent future opioid addiction.

The opioid epidemic has created numerous negative outcomes for NYS's working class and economic stability. According to a national survey conducted in 2019, nearly 75% of employers have reported that the opioid epidemic has affected their workplace; however, only 17% indicated being prepared to address the issue[1]. Workplaces unequipped to handle the effects of the epidemic can face issues with safety, employee retention, and overall finances[2]. Employers are increasingly concerned about their workers, with 79% expressing concern about prescription drug usage[3]. The number of overdoses in the workplace increased between 2011 and 2019, with an average 24% increase per year from 2011-2018 and 2.6% in 2019. This issue presents a persistent problem for employers as total annual overdoses marked a record high every year since 2013[4]. NYS has implemented numerous preventative measures and initiatives to combat its consequences, such as the development of the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, addiction and pain management training for healthcare providers, and improving data collection[5], however, workplace specific initiatives are lacking to both support workers in recovery and alleviate employer burden.

Implementing Recovery Ready Workplace (RRW) programs also benefits employees by offering treatment and support to those affected by substance use disorder (SUD), improving their employability. Studies have shown an association between the duration of abstinence with employment, reporting an increase in employment rates and overall income associated with prolonged periods of abstinence. However, despite the rise in employment rates among individuals struggling with SUD, substance use remains a barrier to employment for those in recovery[5]. Lack of employment opportunities also restricts their ability to receive federal benefits[7] as many welfare programs, such as SNAP, impose working requirements of at least 30 hours a week[8]. These limitations negatively affect the social determinant of health for those in recovery, emphasizing the need for initiatives, such as RRW programs, that provide opportunities for people with SUD to return to work while supporting their recovery journey.

The overprescription of opioids contributed to a net loss of 225,000 workers from New York's labor market between 2009 and 2015 due to workers becoming opioid-dependent post-injury and a $179.4 billion loss to the state's economy[9]. RRW programs would mitigate these consequences by providing outreach and training to employers to equip them to support current opioid-dependent employees and prevent new cases. Employers have saved $8,500 annually by implementing strategies that reduce hiring and healthcare costs, increase employee retention, and improve workplace safety[9].

The opioid epidemic also contributed to stigmatization of those with substance use disorder (SUD). Often those battling SUD are thought to be victims of their own choices, unstable, and unreliable, resulting in social exclusion[10]. Adopting an RRW expands the labor force to a group of people that have

been previously excluded while simultaneously reducing societal stigma surrounding the capabilities of those in recovery.

Supporting employment of those in recovery through adoption of the public health initiative of Recovery Ready Workplaces reduces the harmful consequences of the opioid epidemic on our community and economy. NYSACHO supports this legislation and recommends it be enacted into law.

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1. B2B International PowerPoint Template October 2018 2018 (nsc.org)
2. Implications of Opioid Use Disorders for Employers - National Safety Council (nsc.org)
3. Preventing Opioid Overdose Deaths in the Workplace | Blogs | CDC
4. Deaths from unintentional overdoses in the workplace continued to rise in 2019 : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov)
5. Addressing the Opioid Epidemic in New York State (ny.gov)
6. Rate and Predictors of Employment among Formerly Polysubstance Dependent Urban Individuals in Recovery - PMC (nih.gov)
7. Welfare Reform and Substance Abuse - PMC (nih.gov)
8. Welfare Reform and Substance Abuse: Innovative State Strategies - NCBI Bookshelf (nih.gov)
9. State-by-State: The Labor Force and Economic Effects of the Opioid Crisis (americanactionforum.org)
10. The Impact of Stigma on People with Opioid Use Disorder, Opioid Treatment, and Policy - PMC (nih.gov)