

A GROWING EPIDEMIC

Prescription painkiller abuse is a growing epidemic affecting workers from all industries and all types of jobs.

As workplaces all over the country see an increase in employees impacted by addiction to prescription opioids, human resources professionals continue to look for the best way to stem this crisis. It's a difficult path for employers to navigate, since most employees using prescription painkillers have obtained them lawfully with a valid prescription. However, it is important for employers to understand the negative impacts of the issue, and what they can do about it.

\$26 billion/year: The amount employers lost from the consequences of prescription pain medication abuse, including absenteeism, diminished productivity, and lost earnings from premature death. ¹

\$1.4 billion/year: What workplace insurers (i.e., Worker's Compensation program underwriters) spend on narcotic and opioid painkillers. ²

9x higher: The overall cost to treat a workplace injury when a narcotic painkiller is prescribed. ³

4 out of 5: The number of employers that have had to deal with opioid prescription painkiller addiction and abuse in their workplace. ⁴

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A message from Wisconsin Department of Justice, Brad Schimel, Attorney General, and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services

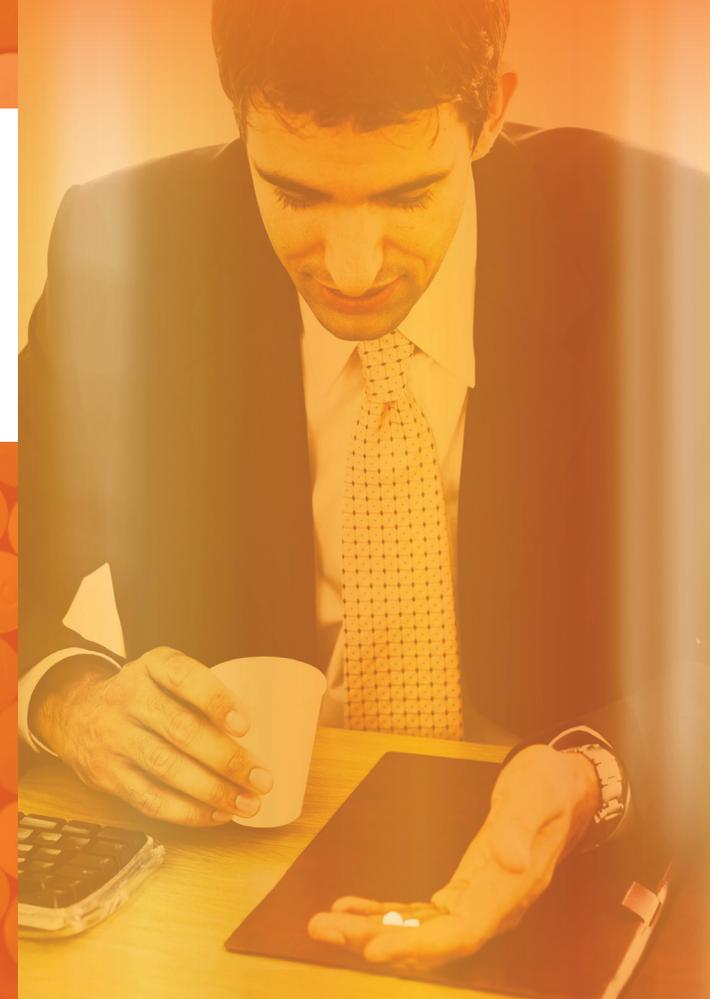


Wisconsin
Department of Health Services

Sources:

1. National Business Group on Health's Employers Guide to Workplace Substance Abuse 2009
2. "Pain Pills Add Cost and Delays to Job Injuries", New York Times, June 2012
3. Accident Fund Holdings Study
4. National Safety Council study of Indiana employers December 2015

PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER ABUSE A DOSE OF REALITY FOR EMPLOYERS



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WHAT YOU CAN DO

First, consult your human resources professional and/or legal counsel before you do anything. This is where civil rights, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and many state protections come into play. Although federal and state laws limit your options in addressing prescription drug use in the workplace, that doesn't mean you can afford to do nothing.



Here are some steps for employers to take:

Evaluate or re-evaluate your company's drug policy.

Your company has the right to provide a drug-free workplace. However, your drug-free workplace policy might only currently address illegal drugs. With the increased use of narcotic and opioid prescription painkillers, you should revisit these policies and update them in tandem with human resources and legal counsel.

Consider including prescription medications in your company's drug testing program.

Drug tests can be perceived as being highly intrusive, but they can be invaluable tools for preventing drug-related incidents and reducing risk, according to the National Safety Council. In several safety-sensitive industries, in addition to the industry-standard Department of Transportation panel, employers are also testing for prescription medications such as barbiturates (pentobarbital, butabarbital), benzodiazepines (alprazolam, diazepam), synthetic opiates (hydrocodone, hydromorphone, and oxycodone), propoxyphene (although this drug is no longer manufactured), and methadone. A relatively new trend is the addition of buprenorphine (suboxone).

Educate employees about the dangers of prescription painkiller use and misuse.

According to the National Safety Council, employees should know:

- To discuss concerns about taking prescription narcotic and opioid painkillers with their prescribing medical professional and ask for a non-narcotic alternative.
- What state law says about driving while using prescription drugs. In Wisconsin, you can be cited and/or arrested for drugged driving even if you are under the influence of a legitimately prescribed medication.
- The risks of taking painkillers while performing safety-sensitive tasks.
- How to safely store and dispose of prescription painkillers.
- Never to take someone else's prescribed painkillers or share any drugs with anyone.

Train supervisors and managers. Make sure they know the company's current drug-free workplace and drug-testing policies and any updates as they're made. Train them to recognize the potential signs of drug impairment and the proper steps to take if they suspect an employee is impaired.

Look into use of an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). EAPs are typically programs that offer employees up to three confidential counseling sessions at no cost to the employee on a wide range of mental health and behavioral health issues.

As an employer, you have committed resources into finding, hiring and training the best people you can. Protect your business by helping educate employees on the risks of prescription painkillers, and provide help for those who may be suffering from addiction. By becoming familiar with the signs of a growing addiction, proactively testing or clarifying company policies around prescription drug use in the office, and keeping in mind that addiction can happen to anyone, you may be able to prevent your team from suffering the ill-effects of opioid addiction.



The Wisconsin Department of Justice and the Wisconsin Department of Health Services have created workplace education materials on prescription painkiller abuse education and prevention that can be accessed and downloaded by employers at no cost.

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