

# IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Addressing addiction and mental health in the workplace

Information for Leaders

## Treatment for substance misuse and gambling problems: Frequently asked questions

### Is a person cured when they come back from a treatment program?

People cannot be “cured” of an addiction in the same way that they can be cured of an infection or some types of cancer.

After treatment, people are in recovery. Just as it can take years to develop a severe problem, it can take a long time to recover. Attending a treatment program is a starting point for many people. It gives them the opportunity to explore the role that substance use or gambling has played in their lives, and to learn skills for coping without using. Once treatment is completed, the recovering person must start to use these skills in real life and strengthen them through practice. Recovery is an ongoing process, not a completed event.

### What do I do if I'm not sure whether an employee has been away on medical leave for a mental health concern or an addiction problem?

The reason for anyone's absence from work for a medical problem is confidential and kept between the employee and the professional providing care. The person may be away because they asked for help for an addiction problem, a mental health problem or a physical ailment. Leaders and co-workers only need to know what the employee chooses to tell them.

Sometimes, the employee is referred to treatment as a result of a formal workplace referral. In these instances, the manager or supervisor may have initiated the referral process and will know where the employee has gone. Employers will also need to find out if there are any special needs or limits on the kinds of work they can do when they return to work, and to determine if they will require further time off for appointments related to their illness. No matter the reason, all co-workers should make the employee feel welcome when they come back.

### I know somebody whose life was messed up because of drinking. They quit but, just when it looked like they were getting it together, they relapsed. Why?

If people could easily say no to alcohol or other drugs once they have a problem, they would. Unfortunately, change is not that simple, and there are many reasons why a person might relapse. While outsiders may see only the problems a person's substance use causes, they may not understand how much that person has come to rely on alcohol or other drugs to manage their life.

Some people with substance use problems have relied on that substance for many years to see them through stress, grief, celebration and depression. Those in recovery must first learn how their use fits into their lives and how

to manage all aspects of their lives without substances. People in recovery have to make many changes in their lives and their behaviour. It can be extremely difficult to make them all at once.

## For more information

Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health offices offer a range of prevention and treatment services to assist businesses in managing workplace addiction and mental health concerns. For more information, and to find an addiction and mental health services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322 or the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642. For more workplace-specific resources, please visit: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2672.asp>



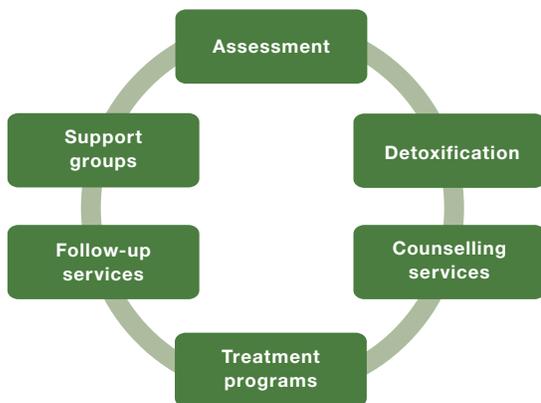
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## The continuum of treatment services for substance misuse

There are many options for people who need help quitting alcohol, other drugs or gambling. These include having an assessment, going to a detox centre, talking with a counsellor or attending an addictions treatment program. Remember: change is a process, not an event!



### Assessment

The first step for many people is an assessment. Counsellors will ask them to reflect on how their addiction is affecting their lives, help them determine how serious the problem is, help them decide what changes they want to make and direct them to the relevant services in their community. Some workplace employee assistance programs (EAP) and employee and family assistance programs (EFAP) provide assessment services. Addictions professionals are also available to complete assessments in most communities.

### Detoxification (detox)

Withdrawal is a process a person goes through when they stop taking a substance that their body has become physically dependent on (e.g., alcohol and opioid drugs, such as heroin or oxycodone). A detox centre is a place where people can go to safely withdraw from alcohol or other drugs. Withdrawal symptoms vary depending on what type of drug(s) the person has been using, how long they have been using, what combinations they have been taking, how healthy they are and how old they are. Withdrawal can be life-threatening. In communities where no detox centre is available, people needing support through the detox process can go to their local hospital.

### Counselling services

Most communities offer counselling services for people with substance use or gambling problems. People can attend information sessions, talk to a counsellor individually or join a counselling group. Those concerned about someone else's substance use or gambling can get help. Counselling for teens and children from homes where substance use or gambling is a problem is also available.

### Treatment programs

Treatment programs are intensive. People attend them every day for several weeks. Most are residential or in-patient programs, with clients staying for long- or short-term treatment.

Some of these programs may not be available in all communities, so a person must go elsewhere to attend. Talk to your local Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health office for programs available in your area, as well as other options available throughout Alberta. Treatment programs usually provide group and individual counselling, a range of workshops to help people learn new skills to overcome problems, support group meetings and leisure activities.

There are a range of types of treatment programs available, including some that are designed specifically for workplace referrals. There are gender-specific programs (programs designed for just men or just women), programs for youth and programs for those with specific addictions (e.g., cocaine or gambling). Support programs are also available to family members of those with alcohol, other drug or gambling problems. Treatment can be a powerful experience during which people learn much about themselves. They will leave the program with a recovery plan to help them stay clean and sober, which includes actions they can take after leaving treatment. These may include attending 12-step or other support group meetings, seeing a counsellor, or going to a follow-up program at a later date. People are not “cured” when they leave treatment—it is only the start of the healing process. Recovery starts when they leave the program and begin to manage their lives without relying on substance use or gambling to cope.

## Follow-up services

These services provide support to people after they have completed treatment. They help people build on the skills they learned in treatment and provide support for issues and concerns they face once they are home and back to work. The person may see a counsellor one on one, attend a group or return to the treatment program for a formal follow-up program.

## Support groups

These are independent groups of people who come together to help each other deal with a common problem. They offer ongoing support to help people in the months, or even years, after they decide to quit using.

Best known are the worldwide 12-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous. There are also 12-step groups for those concerned about someone else’s use (e.g., Al-Anon, Nar-Anon and Gam-Anon).

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*Information for Leaders & Employees*



## How people change

Think of a time when you tried to make a change in your life. Maybe it was quitting smoking, losing weight or establishing an exercise routine. Was it easy? Did it happen all at once? Probably not—changing behaviour takes time, and there are usually many ups and downs before you succeed.

People in recovery from addiction often say that quitting alcohol, other drugs or gambling is actually easy—it's staying abstinent that's the hard part. They face many problems, such as issues at work, rebuilding relationships and addressing financial difficulties. And they must handle all of this without the addiction that they've used to rely on to cope or escape. It is very easy to slip back into old habits when under stress.

Recovery from a mental health problem is similar. There is often a trial and error process to select the most effective medication and counselling approach, thus a person's return to health can be a slow process.

Those who are most successful usually use a variety of resources to help them make the initial change. They also build a strong support network of family, friends, work colleagues and professionals to whom they turn when the going gets rough. This support network also helps the recovering person to recognize their success.

## Recovery and preventing relapse

Recovery is an ongoing process of maintaining change. To be successful in recovery and prevent relapse, people with an addiction will likely need to

- develop new ways of dealing with their feelings
- learn how to deal with cravings for alcohol or other drugs
- have a well-developed plan for dealing with triggers and high-risk situations
- learn how to express their feelings appropriately
- have a support system
- find new ways of having fun without alcohol, other drugs or gambling
- examine areas of their lives that were damaged by their addictive behaviour or mental illness (e.g., rebuilding relationships, focusing on physical health and repaying debts)
- know the workplace consequences of a relapse
- deal with the perceptions, attitudes and expectations of others

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Information for Leaders & Employees



## Recovery

### Can people recover?

Each person has a different idea about what “recovery” means. Many people measure recovery by their success in meeting their treatment goals.

However, recovery is a process. It depends as much on attitude as on following a treatment plan. The process of recovery can include

- developing self-confidence
- having hope and optimism about the future
- setting achievable goals
- making changes to housing, lifestyle or employment situations

Recovery takes time and may require ongoing counselling or attendance at self-help or support group meetings. Some flexibility with scheduled work hours may be necessary for a period of time after the employee returns to work.

### Issues in recovery

Treatment can be considered a kick-start to recovery. But recovery is an ongoing process. Some of the challenges people in recovery face are listed below.

### Dealing with cravings for alcohol or other drugs

- People in early recovery may experience intense cravings and urges to return to using. Cravings can occur at work; if alcohol or other drugs are available on site, it can be a high-risk situation for relapse.

### Dealing with feelings

- When people first get treatment, whether it be for alcohol, other drugs or mental illness, they may feel like they're riding an emotional roller coaster. One minute they feel ready to take on the world. The next, they are exhausted and overwhelmed by everything going on in their lives. The roller coaster can be scary. These extreme feelings do subside over time, but may arise when a person least expects them.
- When returning to work after treatment, workers may also have to deal with their co-workers' feelings towards them. There could be resentment or anger for their past behaviour. The recovering person may feel shame or embarrassment. These feelings can be very uncomfortable to deal with.

### Creating a balanced life

- Once in recovery, people must rebuild relationships with family and friends, find ways to have fun, address any employment, financial or legal problems and deal with anything else that needs attending to. They must learn to handle problems as they arise, so that they don't pile up and become unmanageable.
- One of the ways people try to cope in early recovery is to overwork themselves. Overwork can lead to more stress and to relapse. A supervisor can monitor this and help the employee set appropriate work hours.

### Dealing with health issues

- A person's physical health may have been damaged by their involvement with substances, especially if the addiction has been part of their life for a long time. A recovering person's health issues can create difficulties at work, including more time off or a temporary reassignment.

## Dealing with perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of others

- People in early recovery are often worried about how they will be treated by others. Some may expect a person in early recovery to behave very differently, even though they are still the same person. Others may expect them to remain the same and not make any changes in their life. The recovering employee must also decide what and how much to tell co-workers about their addiction or mental health recovery, which is difficult.
- The initial weeks and months of recovery can be very stressful for both the individual and the people around them. It takes time to rebuild relationships. Supervisors may need time before feeling that they can trust the person to do their job in a safe and satisfactory way.

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## Understanding relapse

### What is relapse?

A person in recovery is not “cured.” In their most severe forms, mental health and substance use problems are both lifelong.

This means that, even after a person has received treatment, their problems may come back. When this happens, it is called a relapse.

### Relapse is part of the recovery process

People who have a supportive family and job to go back to after treatment are less likely to relapse. However, it is still a concern for an employee in early recovery. Many businesses have policies in place that spell out the consequences if an employee relapses. It is important that the employee returning to work clearly understands these consequences. This is one of the many realities the person must deal with while in recovery. But it can also provide increased motivation to stay clean and sober.

When a person has a relapse, they may become discouraged and give up on their treatment plan. However, relapsing is common. It is not a reason to stop treatment. It is more helpful to see it as another step in the recovery process.

Relapse can be used as a chance to

- learn about the things that might lead to another relapse
- review the treatment plan (and make any necessary changes)
- renew a plan of action to continue recovering

*There are many ways leaders and co-workers can provide support to a recovering employee, which can reduce the likelihood of a relapse. Some suggestions for how to support employees' return to work can be found in Manulife Financial's Return to Work—A Manager's Guide: <http://www.viu.ca/HumanResources/documents/Manulife-RTW-Managers-Guide.pdf>.*

### Why do people relapse?

It's no wonder people often feel overwhelmed in early recovery: they have to deal with many issues that were put on hold by their addiction or mental health problem. If they depended on substances to help them cope, it can be even more difficult now. If someone feels overwhelmed, they may be at risk of relapse.

For those with an addiction problem, most relapses occur within the first 90 days of a person's recovery. People are most vulnerable during this time. They are trying to rebuild their lives without relying on substances or gambling to cope. The longer they stay clean and sober, and the more successes they have, the better they are able to handle things without resorting to their old habits. Some people are able to maintain sobriety without ever experiencing a relapse. Others will relapse several times before they are able to make all the changes required to stay away from substances or gambling.



The reasons why a person may relapse include

- not being able to work out their stresses and problems on their own
- using a substance to cope with a mental disorder (e.g., anxiety or depression)
- stopping work on their recovery plan or letting it slide
- feeling they have the problem under control and wanting to test their ability to use or gamble again
- experiencing social pressures at work or at home, especially when having fun and trying to fit in with others

When people relapse, they are often overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and failure. These feelings can drive the person to slip back into old patterns. It is important that a relapse be used as a learning opportunity so that it does not happen again.

## How to use this information in your workplace

- Invite an addictions counsellor to attend a staff meeting to talk about the different kinds of treatment services available in your community.
- Invite a mental health therapist to speak to staff about the process of treatment and recovery, and treatment services available in your community.
- Your local Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) may be able to provide someone who can speak to staff about living with their own mental illness.
- Invite a speaker to discuss what is involved in creating, supporting and maintaining a psychologically safe workplace.
- Invite a speaker from a mutual aid organization, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, to talk to your employees about their recovery and about the support the program has to offer.
- All employees should be aware of the services available to them. When employees return to work after any absence, leaders should provide information on all available services (e.g., employee assistance programs or employee and family assistance programs).

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## Accommodation

### What are the accommodation rights and responsibilities of employers, employees and unions?

A return-to-work process is successful when all parties (the employer, employee, and, if applicable, the union) work collaboratively and co-operatively.<sup>1</sup> It is also important that the manager, employee and union understand one another's role in this process.

#### Accommodation rights and responsibilities of employers, employees and unions<sup>2,3</sup>

Employer	Employee	Union (if applicable)
Create an environment in which employees feel comfortable receiving information about the company's accommodation policy.  Highlight procedures that guarantee confidentiality of requests.	Request accommodation, preferably in writing, and provide information on the type of accommodation needed and how long the accommodation is required.	Be an active participant in the accommodation process.
Once an employee's request is received, the duty to accommodate is on the employer or service provider.	Listen to and consider accommodation options provided by the employer. An employee must accept a reasonable accommodation, even if it is not the one that was originally requested.	Share responsibility with the employer in the development and implementation process.



**Accommodation rights and responsibilities of employers, employees and unions continued<sup>2,3</sup>**

Employer	Employee	Union (if applicable)
<p>Maintain records of employee requests for accommodation and steps taken in working with the employee and experts to explore and understand all accommodations.</p> <p>An employer can request information pertaining to an employee's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prognosis for recovery</li> <li>• fitness to return to work</li> <li>• fitness to perform components of their pre-leave job</li> <li>• restrictions or limitations, and duration thereof, following a return to work</li> </ul>	<p>When requesting an accommodation, the employee does not have to provide specific information on the nature of the illness or specific diagnosis (e.g., an addiction or mental health issue). However, they do need to provide enough information for the employer to understand the accommodations required.</p> <p>The employee is also responsible for notifying the employer of any changes that affect the request for accommodation.</p>	<p>Unless it would create undue hardship, support requests for accommodations, even when such requests are not consistent with the collective agreement.</p>
<p>Respect employee confidentiality and respond to requests in a timely manner. Respond to all requests, even if they are not made formally.</p>	<p>Provide supporting documentation to assist the employer in developing an accommodation.</p>	
<p>Obtain only the information from an employee that is needed to develop an accommodation plan.</p>	<p>Work with the employer to determine an appropriate accommodation. A union and/or other expert may also be involved.</p>	
<p>Take the necessary steps to accommodate the employee, without causing undue hardship for the organization. If full accommodation is not possible due to undue hardship, work with the employee to find options that could partially meet their needs.</p>	<p>If unsure of how reasonable proposed accommodations are, consult with an expert (e.g., human resources or union representatives, or lawyers).</p>	



### Accommodation rights and responsibilities of employers, employees and unions continued<sup>2,3</sup>

Employer	Employee	Union (if applicable)
Train managers, and ensure they understand their obligation to prevent an employee from being harassed due to accommodation. Ensure the employee knows that no form of harassment will be tolerated by the organization.	Once accommodation has been provided, be sure to meet all standards and job requirements.	
Make a formal written agreement with the employee outlining the accommodation and, if applicable, its timelines. Follow up with the employee to ensure the accommodation is meeting their needs.	Work with the employer to ensure success of the accommodation.	
Ensure performance management processes are in place to identify and assist employees prior to performance issues arising.	Be willing to review and potentially modify the accommodation agreement, if needed.	
Pay for costs associated with accommodation (e.g., any required medical certificates).	The employee is responsible for following any continued treatment plan.	
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## What is the duty to accommodate?

According to Mental Health Works, accommodation demonstrates an employer's commitment to a healthier, more equitable workplace.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it is an employer's legal duty to take reasonable steps to accommodate an employee's needs, up to the point of undue hardship. These reasonable steps may include policies or conditions of work. Undue hardship on the employer must be "substantial in nature" (e.g., compromising safety).<sup>4</sup>

"Accommodation means making changes to certain rules, standards, policies, workplace cultures and physical environments to ensure that they don't have a negative effect on a person because of the person's mental or physical disability, religion, gender or any other protected ground."<sup>4</sup>

Accommodations may not be needed in every situation. Some people with mental health issues, for example, may not have any functional limitations and will not require an accommodation at work. However, there may also be a range of long- and short-term accommodations needed, depending on the needs of each individual request. For example, someone returning to work may only require a short-term accommodation, such as setting a flexible schedule or working reduced hours.<sup>2</sup>

## Are there limits on the duty to accommodate?

Yes. According to Mental Health Works, "in Canada, the limits are described as either 'reasonable' accommodation or accommodation to the point of 'undue hardship.'"<sup>5</sup>

Accommodations may create some level of hardship for an employer. However,

accommodations are required unless they create undue hardship, implying that such would create an onerous circumstance for an employer (e.g., financial costs, resources, disruption of operations, and health or safety concerns).<sup>3</sup>

*For more accommodation suggestions, see resources such as the Alberta Human Rights Commission: Duty to Accommodate document: [http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/Bull\\_DutytoAccom\\_web.pdf](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/Bull_DutytoAccom_web.pdf)*

## What information can an employer request for an accommodation request?

It is an employee's responsibility to provide information so that their employer can understand and assess an accommodation request. In this disclosure process, an employer must respect an employee's right to privacy. While employers may not, for instance, request information about an employee's diagnosis, the Alberta Human Rights Commission states that employers may request other information that supports an employee's return to work and necessary accommodation requests.

This includes information on an employee's

- prognosis for recovery
- fitness to return to work
- fitness to perform components of their pre-leave job
- restrictions or limitations, and duration thereof, following a return to work

The Alberta Human Rights Commission advises that when a health professional or physician who is working with the employee provides information to an employer about the employee's fitness for work, it is helpful for that professional or physician to review the employee's job description in order to understand the range of tasks the employee is required to perform.<sup>6</sup>



## How are accommodations determined?

Accommodations are determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the needs of an individual employee and their situation. It is important to remember that accommodations are determined jointly by the employer, employee and, in some cases, the union. While there is no list of required accommodations, there are guiding principles and documents that can be used to assist an employer and employee in determining accommodation. The Alberta Human Rights Commission and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat have a number of useful guiding documents to assist you in determining accommodation. Please see their respective websites:

- <http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/>
- <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/search-recherche/query-recherche-eng.aspx>

## What kinds of accommodations can be made?

Since accommodations are based on the needs of both the employee and employer, it is important that both people work together to find an accommodation that works for them. There are a range of accommodations that can be provided to employees. One example provided by Mental Health Works pertains to employers setting up opportunities to mitigate discrimination and workplace prejudice that may occur toward people with mental health issues in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> This accommodation includes workplace education, issuing statements about a workplace harassment policy and ensuring employees are aware that they can report instances of harassment in the workplace. Another type of accommodation may include an alternative position or an accommodation so they can continue their original job.

Some common accommodations include

- flexibility in start or end time of working hours
- part-time shifts to return a worker to a full-time position
- more frequent breaks
- allowing an employee to work from home
- altering some of the person's job duties
- offering rehabilitation programs<sup>3,7</sup>

## How to determine if an employer has met the duty to accommodate

Employers need to maintain records of employee accommodation requests and the steps employers have taken with the employee (and, if applicable, the union/professional body) to explore and understand accommodation options. These records can be referred to if there are any concerns about whether the duty to accommodate has been met. Mental Health Works outlines some of the criteria courts may look at to determine if the duty to accommodate has been met.<sup>5,8</sup>

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