

# PROFILE 7

## Addictive Behaviours and Employee Productivity

*The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009* assessed addictive behaviours in 2817 employed adults across the province of Alberta. This profile highlights the affect of addictive behaviours on measures of workplace productivity.

### **Absenteeism and Presenteeism**

Rates of absenteeism (missed work) and presenteeism (work activity/output less than 50% of normal) attributed to addictive behaviours are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. Although nearly three quarters of workers (74%) engaged in alcohol use in 2009, few reported work related problems such as absenteeism (1.3%) or presenteeism (2.8%) due to their behaviours. Drug use and gambling contributed even less to reductions in workplace productivity. Overall, figures have decreased since 2002, suggesting a trend toward improvement.

**Table 1: Absenteeism in the Workplace due to Addictive Behaviours**

|  | 2002 | 2009 |
|--|------|------|
| Due to...  |      |      |
| Alcohol  | 4.0% | 1.3% |
| Drug Use   | 0.4% | 0%   |
| Gambling   | 0.1% | 0%   |

**Table 2: Presenteeism in the Workplace due to Addictive Behaviours**

|  | 2002 | 2009 |
|---|------|------|
| Due to...   |      |      |
| Alcohol   | 6.0% | 2.8% |
| Drug Use  | 0.6% | 0.2% |
| Gambling  | 0.2% | 0.2% |

### **Costs of Lost Productivity**

Estimated costs of absenteeism and presenteeism were also calculated. Total wage losses in Alberta tallied to approximately \$21,711,000 in 2009, which works out to about \$10.90 per worker, per year on average. Costs incurred by employers were highest for alcohol use and lowest for problem gambling. When compared to 2002 rates, financial losses attributed to addictions had declined. However, interpretation of these statistics should be done cautiously, since indirect workplace expenses such as treatment, losses due to reduced work quality, and the effects of diminished workplace morale were not accounted for in the figures presented here.

**Table 2: Costs of Absenteeism and Presenteeism in the Workplace**

|          | <b>Absenteeism</b> | <b>Presenteeism</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|----------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Alcohol  | \$8,841,043        | \$12,184,299        | \$21,025,342 |
| Drug Use | \$0                | \$428,703           | \$428,703    |
| Gambling | \$0                | \$257,112           | \$257,112    |

### **Summary**

- Results of the 2009 survey did not show a considerable impact of substance use or gambling on rates of absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace.
- Presenteeism was more common than absenteeism, which may in part reflect the state of our current economy. For instance, employees may attend work despite experiencing functional consequences of a substance use or gambling problem, simply because of their financial need.
- Reduced productivity costs were just under 22 million; likely an underestimate of the global financial losses experienced by Alberta employers annually that are related to addictions.

It seems mutually beneficial to address addictive behaviours before they escalate. Prevention and early intervention requires awareness, knowledge and open communication between companies and their personnel. Job factors (see Profile 5) and occupational roles (see Profile 3) can influence one's propensity for addictions and serve as a method to identify those at greater risk for problems, while organizational policies, responses to violations and the availability of workplace supports (see Profiles 8 and 9) can affect an employee's willingness to seek help. It is important to keep these factors in mind when assessing the service needs of various labour communities and developing programs within and outside of the workplace to address addictive behaviours and minimize their impact on workplace productivity and company profit margins.

For a link to the full report, *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009*, visit: <http://ihe.ca/publications/library/2011/the-alberta-survey-of-addictive-behaviours-and-mental-health-in-the-workforce-2009/>

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