New Report Finds Few Employers Assess Effectiveness of Substance Abuse Policies



Substance misuse and abuse has been linked to absenteeism, lost productivity, safety incidents and injuries, and workplace violence and harassment. Although most Canadian employers have a formal drug and alcohol policy in place, few evaluate the effectiveness of such polices, according to a new Conference Board of Canada report.

The report, Problematic Substance Use and the Canadian Workplace, is based on responses from 179 employers to an online survey. It provides information on the frequency, types, and characteristics of existing drug and alcohol policies and programs among Canadian employers. Highlights:

- Nearly all employers offer their employees at least one drug and alcohol support program.
- Among the employers surveyed, 72% reported having a formal drug and alcohol policy. But only 32% reported that they evaluated the effectiveness of their drug and alcohol support programs and policies.
- To improve the health and well-being of employees, Canadian organizations should add evaluative components to their policies, which would allow proper assessments of their actions in dealing with substance misuse

issues.

Measuring the effectiveness of substance misuse policies and programs has a positive impact on how employers perceived the supports offered to deal with drug and alcohol-related issues. Regular assessments of drug policies also allow employers to keep up with best practices and changes in legislation.

Organizations who *did* conduct evaluations were much more likely than their counterparts to rate their programs as 'very' or 'extremely' effective. Metrics used to evaluate the effectiveness of drug and alcohol support programs and policies include Employee Assistance Program/Employee and Family Assistance Program (EAP/EFAP) utilization rates, number of workplace injuries or incidents, absenteeism rates and referrals to treatment.

Most employers take actions that support, rather than discipline, employees requiring treatment for a substance use issue. In fact, only 3% of the employers surveyed indicated they would suspend or dismiss an employee with a substance use issue. The top three drug and alcohol programs implemented by organizations were:

1. EAP/EFAP
2. Return-to-work support
3. Wellness/health promotion/prevention programs.

For information on drug and alcohol testing, a critical component of a drug and alcohol policy, see the following:

- 11 elements of a testing policy that doesn't violate human rights
- The legal limits of such testing
- How to create an enforceable testing policy
- The Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Irving Pulp* on the legality of a random alcohol testing program
- A checklist for reasonable cause testing for drugs and/or alcohol

- Model post-incident drug and/or alcohol testing procedures.