



# Opioid Crisis and Addiction in the Workplace

Opioid addiction is a shockingly common problem, and it can affect anyone, including highly functioning and successful workers. Addiction takes a massive toll on workers, their families, communities, and our society. Chemical dependence can impact an employee's job performance and threaten the safety and well-being of both the employee and their co-workers. Supporting workers to get treatment is not only right for them, it is also right for the company, saving money in the long term. Regrettably, many employers do not recognize addiction as a common illness that affects a wide array of people. It is often treated with judgement and bias. However, addiction is a disease like any other and should be treated as such.

Opioid abuse, both prescription and illicit, was involved in more than 35,000 deaths in 2015 and increased to nearly 64,000 deaths in 2016. There are now more deaths from drugs, two-thirds of which are opioid related, than from car accidents or gun violence in the U.S. annually. Clearly opioid addiction is a societal crisis. The estimated cost to the economy of this crisis is \$400 billion per year, most of that in the workplace.

In the past 15 years, sales of prescription opioids have nearly quadrupled, with approximately 1 in 3 Americans having a prescription for an opioid. A National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 4.3 million Americans engage in nonmedical use of an opioid each month. In industries where workers have physically demanding jobs, perform repetitive motions, or spend long stretches of time on their feet, opioid abuse rates are even higher. Contractual language is needed to address ongoing opioid abuse.

Therefore, we will seek:

- The creation of “Optimal Care Plans” through the expansion of employer funded, Union administered Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) for the prevention of dependency and addiction caused by chronic use of opioids or other potentially addicting chemicals.
- Increased education and awareness related to the complexities of opioid and other substance abuse addictions for workers and their families.
- Enhanced and expanded treatment programs.
- Treatment, rather than punishment, for workers with addiction.
- Continually updated training for entire worksite populations, including supervisor training.
- The inclusion of appropriate UAW representatives in developing objective written workplace policies related to addressing, treating, or testing formats that are confidential medical information.
- Written policies, where necessary, that are non-punitive and administered in a manner consistent with labor contracts and both state and federal law.