

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE IMPACT ON WORKPLACES

The construction industry is no stranger to the effects of substance use and misuse. Recent studies have shown workers are susceptible to it. And the resulting impact on construction businesses can be significant.

**75%**

of U.S. employers are directly affected by opioids.\*

**15.1%**

of construction workers use drugs in ways other than their intended use.†

**83%**

of employers feel unprepared to handle opioid-related issues.\*

**87.9%**

of employers are not confident that employees can spot warning signs of opioid misuse.\*



## The Impact of the Crisis Is Felt in a Number of Ways

- » **SAFETY.** Opioid use can be associated with injury in the workplace.
- » **ABSENTEEISM.** People struggling with opioid addiction miss nearly 50% more work than the general workforce.
- » **PRODUCTIVITY.** Substance misuse and related disorders are estimated to cost more than \$400 billion in workplace productivity in the U.S.
- » **RETENTION.** 36% of people with a substance use disorder (SUD) and 42% of people with a opioid use disorder (OUD) related to pain medication worked for more than one employer in the past year, compared with 25% of the general workforce.
- » **HEALTH CARE SPEND.** Health care costs for employees who misuse prescription drugs are three times higher than those for an average employee.

\*National Safety Council study, 2019  
†CNA Insurance study, 2017



## Understanding Addiction

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) defines SUD as a long-term relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use despite harmful consequences. SUD can impair physical health, mental health, and other functioning. This disease is not caused by moral shortcomings or weakness of character, and it is not a choice that someone makes. People of all ages, genders, races, socioeconomic statuses, and geographic regions can be affected by SUD.

## Opioids and Opioid Use Disorder

The focus on OUD was in response to the growing opioid misuse and overdose crisis, which was declared a public health emergency in 2017. In that same year, opioids contributed to an average of more than 130 deaths per day — a sixfold increase from 1999.

**WHAT IS AN OPIOID?** Opioids include the illegal drug heroin and legal synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), codeine, morphine, and others.

**WHAT IS FENTANYL?** Fentanyl is designed to relieve pain in end-stage cancer patients, is much stronger than heroin, and is frequently used to “cut” heroin for sale on the streets. A small percentage of prescription fentanyl is diverted to illegal sales, but the vast majority of fentanyl is manufactured overseas and trafficked into the U.S.

## The Opioid Crisis in Delaware

In Delaware, statistics show that drug overdose deaths are increasing. The latest data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lists Delaware as second in the nation for per-capita rates of drug overdose deaths, behind only West Virginia. Delaware is also one of the few states in the top 12 of the CDC’s rankings whose per-capita overdose rates are increasing significantly.

### OUT OF ALL DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS:



84% involved opioids.



Those who overdosed were primarily white males between the age of 25 and 54, never married, and had a high school diploma or GED.



23% were employed in the construction business.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q. Can a prescription for opioids lead to addiction and an opioid use disorder?**

Opioids carry significant risk for dependence, recreational misuse, development of an opioid use disorder (OUD), and fatal overdose. These dangers are associated with how the opioid is taken and in what amount. Methods of misuse include taking the drug in a way other than prescribed, taking someone else's prescription medication, or taking medicine for the pleasurable effects it provides.

### **Q. Is it possible to have a prescription for opioids that is part of an effective treatment plan?**

Opioids are a widely used method of treating moderate to severe, acute, and chronic pain. It is possible to have a prescription for opioids as part of an effective treatment plan.

### **Q. What does opioid dependence/opioid use disorder mean?**

Physical dependence on opioids can occur when an individual takes them at a high enough dose for more than a few days. Physical dependence is not the same as addiction. Opioid use disorder (OUD) can be mild, moderate, or severe, depending on the level of distress and reduction in functioning. Severe OUD is consistent with addiction. OUD is a chronic and treatable disease requiring medical intervention. Similar to other chronic diseases, it often involves cycles of worsening symptoms and remission.

### **Q. What is prescription drug addiction and how is it driving the opioid epidemic?**

Prescription drug addiction occurs when someone either continues to self-medicate with a prescription drug beyond the prescribed use of the medicine, or when someone who was not prescribed the drug obtains and uses it recreationally. People switch from prescription opioids to heroin because it is cheaper and easier to obtain when prescription opioids aren't accessible.

### **Q. What are symptoms of opioid use disorder?**

A person who uses opioids is determined to have an opioid use disorder if they experience at least two of the following 11 symptoms in a 12-month period: taking larger amounts than intended; desire to control use or failed attempts to control use; significant time spent obtaining, using, or recovering from the substance; craving for the substance; failure to meet obligations; social and interpersonal problems; activities given up or reduced; physically hazardous use; physical or psychological problems likely caused by use; tolerance; withdrawal.

