

Opioid-related risk factors at work

Understanding workplace risk factors for opioid-related harms can be key in preventing harm to all workplace parties.

Explain dangers

- **A “work hard, play hard” culture:** Some workplaces in the trades celebrate a culture that normalizes general substance use as a way to cope with physically demanding and stressful work.
- **Pain management:** Because physical injury and pain are common in the trades, workers often use alcohol or other substances, like opioids, to cope. Pain relief is one gateway to opioid dependency and misuse.
- **Stigma:** Social stigma around drug misuse and substance use disorder within families, the health care system, and society at large can make it difficult for individuals to reach out for support.
- **Outdated masculine norms:** Men are often socialized to not talk about their substance use or mental health problems, making them less likely to ask for help when it is needed.
- **Work pace and demands:** For example, rushed contracts that require workers to get a job done “at all costs” can create a high level of pressure and excessive stress.

Identify controls

- Ensure that discussions surrounding mental illness and support include men’s mental health specifically and help men tackle barriers preventing help seeking behaviours with workers.
- Train workplace parties to identify an opioid overdose and administer naloxone. Encourage all workers to complete IHSA’s free [Naloxone training](#) eLearning program.
- Deliver relevant IHSA [safety talks](#) and review other IHSA [resources](#) on topics like mental health assessment, challenging stigma, preventing mental harm, and toxic masculinity.

- It is critical that all workplace parties understand key issues—such as impairment management, accommodations, human rights, and addiction—so the organization can successfully manage substance misuse and related harms.
- Support workers as they navigate the formal accommodation process, if needed. Addiction or substance use disorder is considered a mental health disability and workplaces have a duty to reasonably accommodate a worker.
- Encourage everyone to practise proper ergonomics to reduce the likelihood of sprains and strains and the need for opioids for pain management.

Demonstrate

- Listen to [episodes 34 and 35 of the IHSA Safety Podcast](#), “Beginning the dialogue in the workplace” and “Challenging stigma and reducing mental harm.”
- Shift your mindset, if needed. People in leadership positions need to check their own stigma, bias, and misconceptions around opioids, addiction, and mental health, in order to be supportive leaders.
- Create a plan for implementing controls to manage these key factors, which are known to increase the risk of opioid-related harms in the workplace.
- Read the employer responsibilities section of IHSA’s [Opioid use and workplace implications for trade sectors guide \(W132\)](#).
- Ensure all workers know how to support a colleague or peer who may require connection to resources and other supports for mental health or addiction concerns. Share IHSA’s [supporter toolkit](#) and other mental health resources from our website.