



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Addiction Epidemic in America

The epidemic of drug addiction in America is steadily increasing. More people are dying from drug overdoses than any other cause of injury death—including traffic accidents, guns, or falls.

Currently, physicians in the United States prescribe more opioid-based drugs per capita than any other country in the world. The U.S. is only 5% of the world's population, yet it consumes 80% of opioids and 95% of Vicodin in the world.

This increase in prescription drug abuse in the U.S. has fueled a rise in heroin addiction, but it is not just prescription painkillers and heroin use that has multiplied. Use of cocaine, benzodiazepines (sedatives like Valium and Xanax), and stimulants like methamphetamine has risen dramatically since the year 2000.

According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, more than 21 million Americans 12 years of age or older suffer from a substance use disorder.

Substance Abuse in Schools

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals reports that 68% of high school graduates in America say that drugs play a major role in their lives, and 71% of high school students describe their school as "drug infested."

Fifty percent of college students binge drink (approximately 6 drinks in 2 hours) and/or abuse drugs monthly. Twenty-three percent of all college students in the U.S. would be diagnosed as fully alcohol or drug dependent. This is 3 times the national average.

On average; 2,600 students are injured daily on college campuses because of the effects of alcohol/drugs. Three hundred female college students are sexually assaulted daily due to the effects

of alcohol/drugs and 6 college students die daily on college campuses across America due to alcohol/drug use.

According to Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the number one cause of death in the United States of 18- to 24-year-olds is substance abuse.

U.S. Drug-Related Deaths

Eighty-seven people die every day due to gun violence in the United States—1 person every 17 minutes—and these deaths have rightly caused a national protest against gun violence. However, more than 100 people die from drug overdose every day in the U.S.—approximately 1 person every 14 minutes—and there has yet to be a national outcry over these entirely preventable deaths.

Some have said that substance abuse is the largest man-made epidemic America has ever experienced. Addiction is surely a national epidemic, and preventing it and supporting those who need treatment should be our highest priorities. But sadly, of an estimated 22.7 million Americans (8.6%) needing treatment for a problem related to drugs or alcohol, on average, only about 2.5 million people (0.9%) receive treatment at a specialty facility.

With a constant stream of new reports in the media about deaths, injury, and serious problems associated with drug and alcohol use, the need for solutions to America's drug problem has never been greater.

Substance Abuse Prevention

Too many American citizens suffer from accidents, damaged relationships, impaired judgment, lost educational and employment opportunities, addiction, and death as a result of drug abuse. Rather than be reactive to these societal problems, would it not make sense to be proactive and prevent the problems before they occur?

Successful substance abuse prevention programs lead to reductions in overdose deaths and traffic fatalities, violence, unwanted pregnancy, child abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, injuries, cancer, heart disease, and lost productivity.

But to truly be effective, substance abuse prevention programs must be evidence-based. In a broad sense, an evidence-based prevention program has been evaluated and found to produce positive outcomes. Successful programs are also “research-based”—in that they have undergone some type of standardized evaluation and have been proven to produce positive effects, such as delaying or reducing substance use. Evidence-based, research-based substance abuse prevention programs have a profound beneficial impact on society. These programs make our streets and homes safer from crime, improve our health, increase our employment, make us better parents, make us safer drivers, reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, reduce workers’ comp insurance claims, and increase our overall social functioning.

Drug Prevention at Work

Drug prevention programs and drug education are critical components of any effort to curb substance abuse, and must target every segment of society, including the workplace. Substance abuse by employees results in decreased productivity and performance; increased safety and injury risks; increased absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover; and an increase in theft in the workplace. Drug free workplace programs are powerful substance abuse prevention programs

because they target drug use at the largest concentration of demand: the American workforce.

But drug free workplace programs and drug testing at work do much more than prevent substance abuse and the resulting problems it causes. They also positively impact a company’s bottom line.

In a study published in the Journal of Global Drug Policy and Practice, human resource professionals were asked about their organization’s drug free workplace programs, and reported the following after the implementation of a drug testing program: One-fifth (19%) of companies experienced an increase in employee productivity after the implementation of a drug testing program; employers with high absenteeism rates reported a drop from 9% to 4% after implementing a drug testing program, an improvement of 56%; companies with high workers’ compensation incidence rates reported a drop from 14% to 6% after implementing drug testing programs, an improvement of 57%; and 16% of companies reported a net employee turnover decrease. All of these factors positively impact a company’s bottom line, but managers and supervisors within a drug free workplace also know that drug free workplace programs contribute positively to a company’s image and are an effective deterrent to drug abuse.

Call to Action

With one in ten Americans reporting illicit drug use, it’s more important than ever that we all join together and encourage our federal and state policymakers to take urgent action to increase prevention efforts, treatment access, and recovery support services for all who need them.

To help us combat substance abuse, go to www.LiveDrugFree.org and click on “Donate!”