



# EMPLOYERS' UNDERSTANDING OF ADDICTION IN THE WORKPLACE

2018 SURVEY



## Employers' Understanding of Addiction in the Workplace



# INTRODUCTION

Opioid abuse has been described as a “National Emergency” in the United States, with the worsening burden affecting not only the individual but those around them – co-workers, friends, and family. According to the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), approximately 2 million Americans abuse opioids, of which more than 100 die daily. According to data from the CDC, about 42,249 deaths in 2016 were attributed to opioid overdose and the number of deaths from opioid overdose has increased by more than five times since 1999.

A key factor contributing to this growing trend is the increased access to and availability of opioid prescriptions. According to a study by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), more than 240 million opioid prescriptions were written in one year. This is enough to make one bottle of opioid pills available to every American adult. However, according to reports from the National Survey for Drug Use and Health, over 50 percent of people who abuse opioid receive them from family or friends for free.

In addition to the health implications and high mortality rates associated with opioid abuse, the crisis also cripples workplace activities and impairs productivity. Data from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reveals that approximately 76 percent of opioid and alcohol abusers are employed and this has led to a significant decline in workplace productivity across various organizations. From reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, disrupted workflow due to presenteeism and arrests, employers are beginning to feel the brunt of the opioid crisis.

According to a survey by the National Safety Council (NSC), more than 70 percent of U.S employers report that employee opioid abuse has significantly affected their businesses. Employers report losing approximately \$10 billion in costs of opioid-related absenteeism and presenteeism. Employees who abuse opioids cost almost twice as much as employees who don't. Generally, opioid abuse cost the U.S economy over \$56 billion in direct and indirect costs.

**Employers, therefore, play a critical role in curbing this problem from the worksites. Effective strategies employers can employ to control this opioid crisis include:**

- Identifying warning signs and symptoms of opioid abuse such as slurred speech, unexplainable drowsiness at work, frequent unannounced disappearances from work, excessive errors and oversights on simple assignments, and poor attention.
- Formulating and implementing workplace drug prohibition and drug testing policies.
- Referral of affected employees to the Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) to confirm the drug problem, educate the individual on the health risks and other complications of opioid abuse, and appropriately refer them to an expert or counselor for further management.

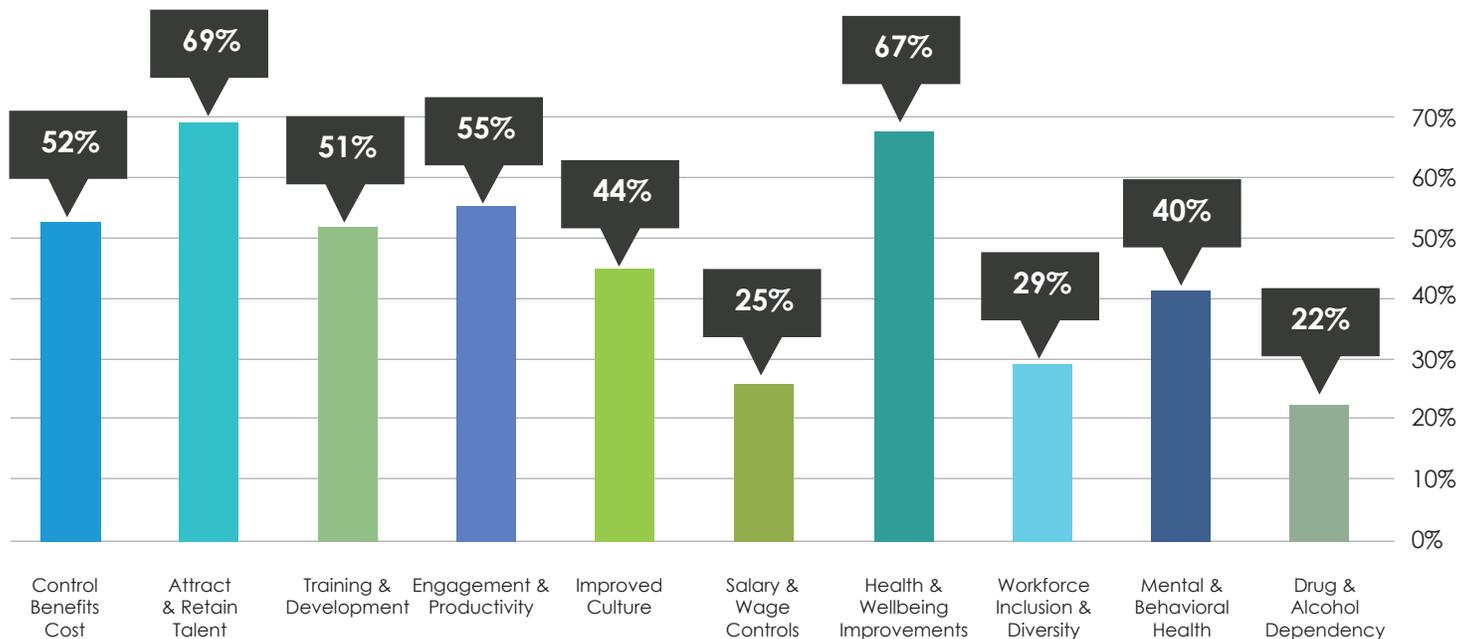
In a survey of 249 HR and insurance professionals conducted by Global Healthcare Resources (GHR) on employers' understanding of workplace drug addiction and strategies they employ in curbing the opioid menace, most respondents (84.75 percent) also had knowledge of the negative effects of opioid abuse and addiction on employee work-life balance. However, 52.61 percent of the respondents reported not having a drug dependency program for employees with drug dependency and addiction. The other 47.39 percent revealed that they had drug dependency programs in place at their workplaces for such employees. **Half of the employers currently offer inpatient care (48 percent fully insured and 50 percent self-funded)**

Further findings from the survey revealed that most employers were largely interested in learning about strategies for curbing workplace drug abuse. Approximately 72.62 percent (122 of 168) of the respondents noted that they were interested in learning about the strategies for curbing workplace drug and alcohol dependency in their organizations. Additionally, more respondents (50 percent) reported not having adequate knowledge in choosing the best treatment facilities for affected employees. **One thing is for certain that the majority believe that accreditation matters when choosing the right treatment center with reputation following in order.**

Third-party treatment providers may also be of benefit to employers in clamping down on workplace drug abuse. Of 177 respondents interviewed, 35.03 percent revealed that they worked with third-party substance abuse treatment providers for resources and treatment of their employees who abuse drugs, while 64.97 percent revealed that they did not. Of 98 respondents interviewed about inpatient treatment for affected employees, 48.98 percent reported that the average cost for inpatient treatment of drug addiction-related problems ranged from \$10,000 to \$30,000.

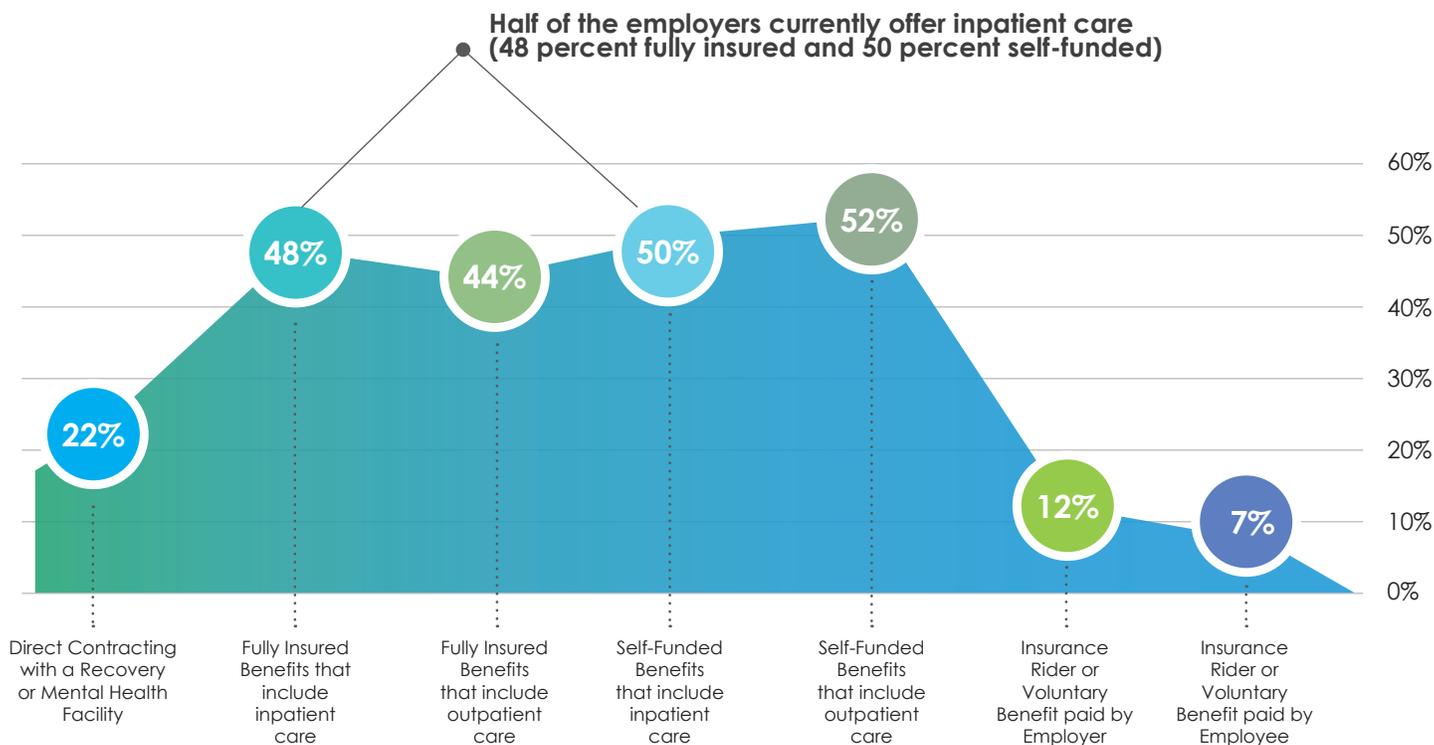
Q1

## What are your **top business human resource** priorities?



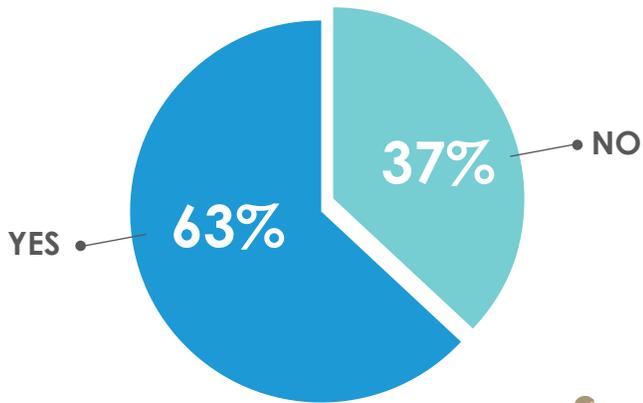
Q2

## What types of **programs** do you have in place?



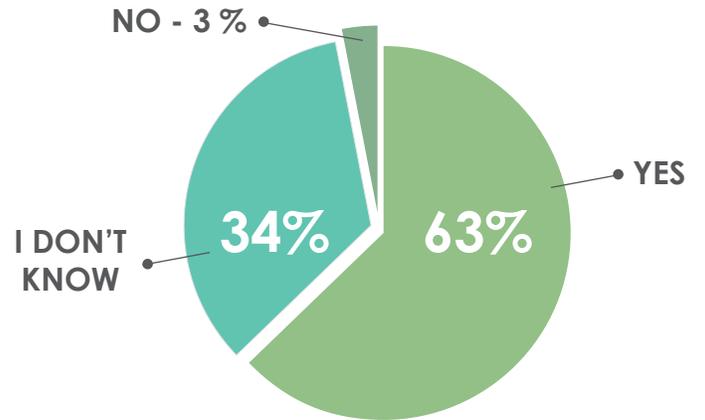
Q3

Do you steer employees to specific addiction treatment facilities based upon data success rates and readmission rates for treatment facilities?



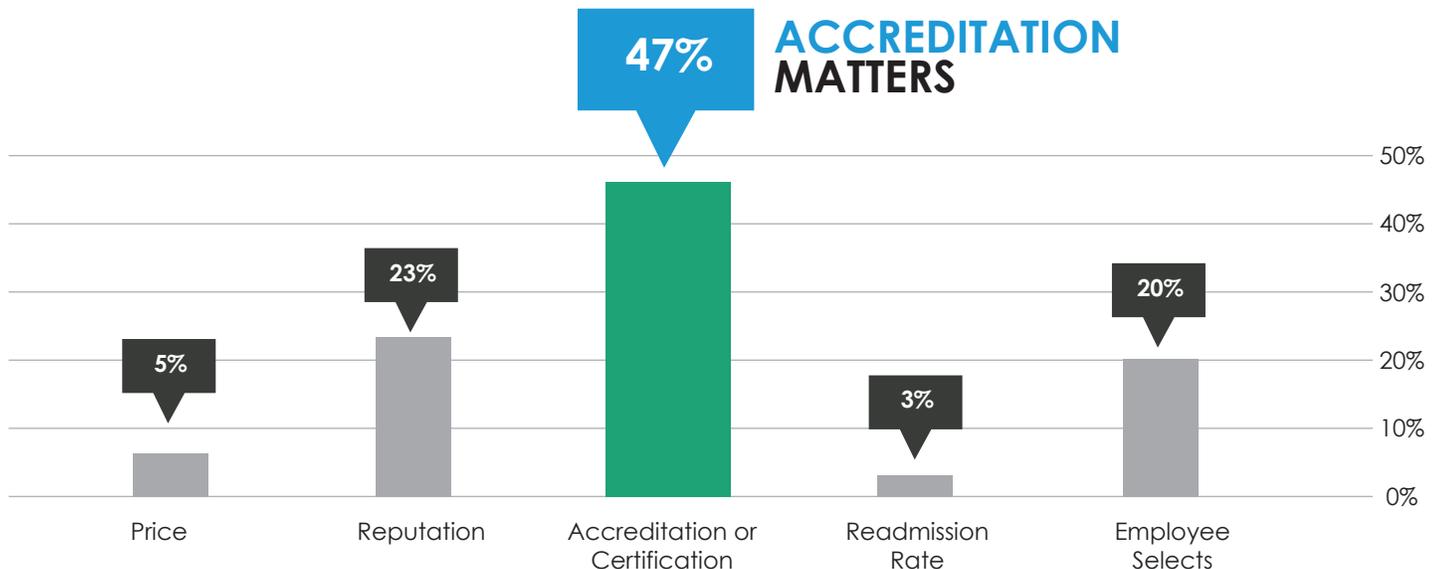
Q4

Would you be willing to hire back an employee who struggles with addiction but has gone to necessary treatment?



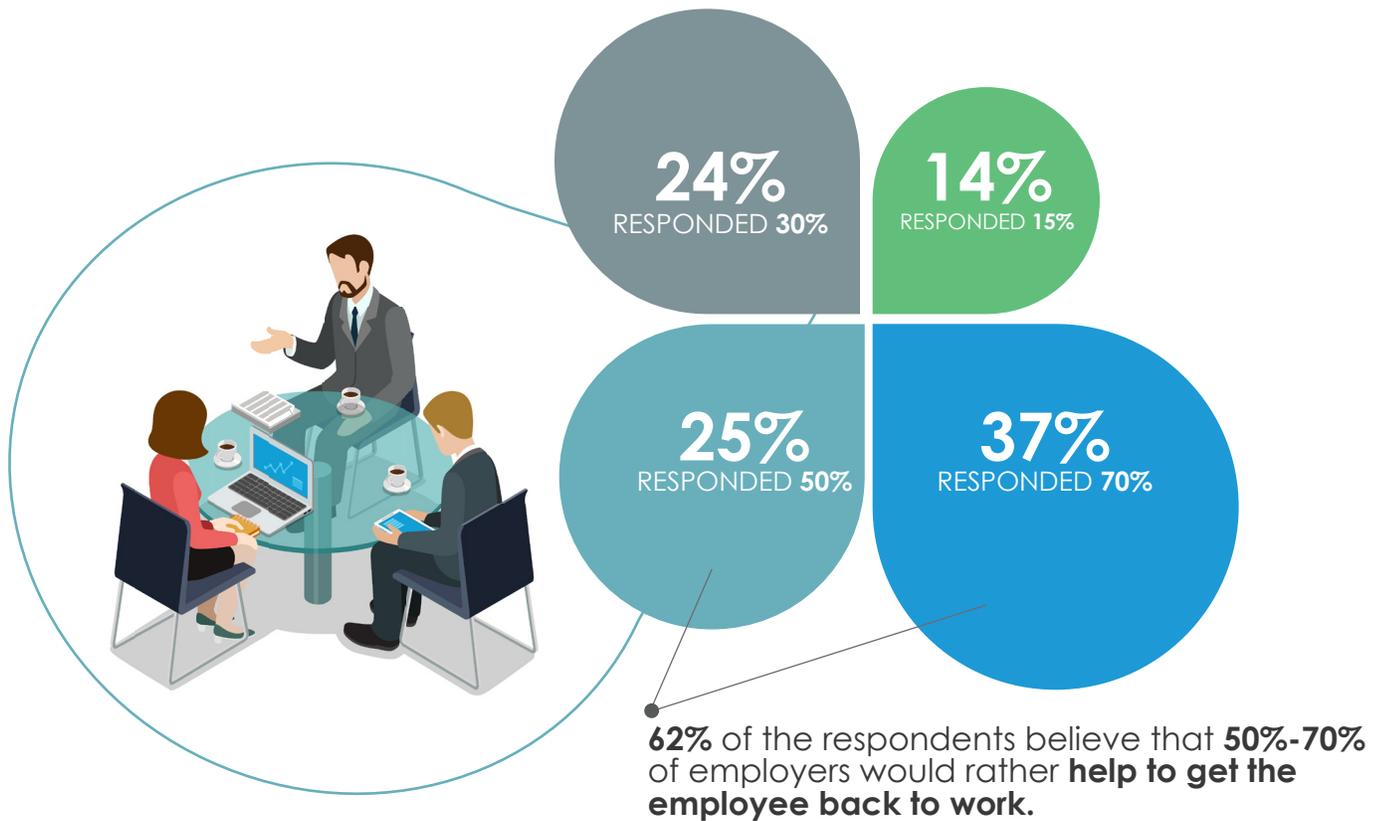
Q5

What basis does your company use to select a treatment facility?



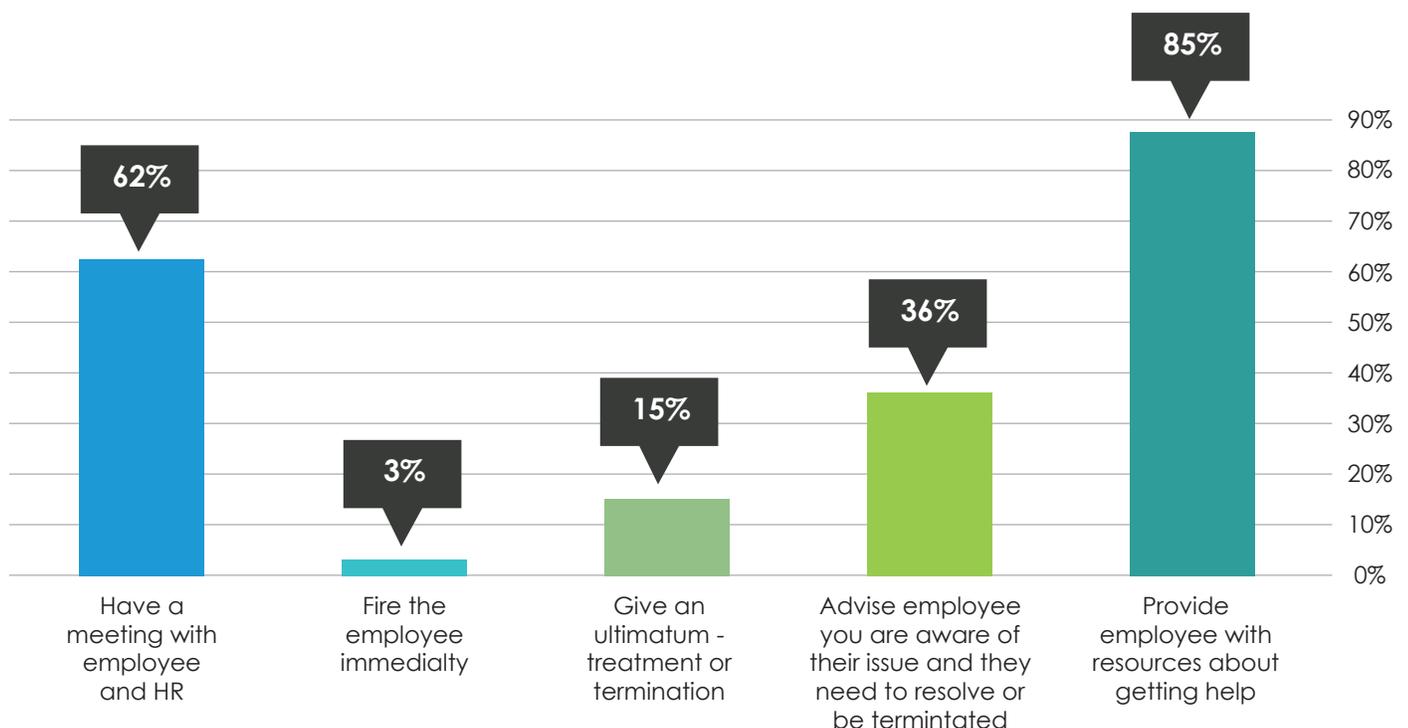
Q6

In your opinion, what percentage of Employers would like to help their current employees struggling with prescription drug misuse return to their positions after completing treatment versus bringing on new staff?



Q7

If you found out that an employee had a drug or alcohol issue would you :





# CONCLUSION

The growing burden of opioid abuse has deleterious effects not only on the health of the abuser but also on their work productivity, company success, and the economy. Employers may become actively involved in curbing this menace through the formulation of strict workplace drug policies, provision of appropriate educational resources, initiation of employee assistance programs, and collaboration with drug addiction control experts to curb the opioid crisis.

These methods should, however, be tailored to what is generally appropriate for the organization. Employees may largely be comfortable learning about the implications of drug abuse in a convenient and non-confrontational way, such as through online platforms. In the survey, 82.05 percent of respondents noted that online resources were most useful in providing the requisite education to their staff members on the complications of drug abuse. However, more than half (69.77%) of the respondents interviewed on the use of educational and training services by addiction experts reported that they were not interested in such services.

The use of appropriate strategies to educate employees on the risks of opioid abuse, in combination with the implementation of strict drug policies, will lead to a significant and sustainable decline in the opioid crisis.



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