

Drug and Alcohol Misuse Costs Australian Businesses £5.2 billion Every Year

Workplace substance abuse is becoming more and more of a problem, with an estimated 7.4 million lost working days in Australia annually. Each year the Australian business industry loses \$A5.2 billion due to employee's misuse of drugs and alcohol*. Businesses are hit hard in terms of absenteeism, loss in productivity, healthcare costs, and worker turnover. So what should employers be doing to tackle this problem?

Businesses are being encouraged to implement Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). These short-term counselling and referral services are intended to help employees and their family members deal with personal problems, including substance abuse, which may adversely impact their work performance.

According to Alastair Mordey, Programme Director at The Cabin Chiang Mai, a leading addiction treatment facility, " Increasing numbers of employers are recognizing the benefits of implementing a comprehensive alcohol and drug-free workplace policy and providing Employee Assistance. We advise them on how to conduct brief in-company interventions, when it is prudent to send the employee for psychological assessment, and in serious cases, referral to substance abuse treatment facilities."

Who Should Take Responsibility in the Workplace?

Those responsible for conducting such policies are generally the employee's line supervisors/managers. However, it must be made clear that they are only responsible for evaluating an employees' work-performance, not diagnosing suspected substance abuse. The intervention aims to restore the employees' productivity and is not intended to be punitive.

5 Steps For A Successful Intervention

1. Identify an employee who may be affected by drugs or alcohol abuse.
2. Keep a conclusive record of work performance, especially as it may be necessary to counter the employee's denials.
3. Initiate a discussion. This sets the tone for subsequent meetings and is crucial in achieving a successful intervention.
4. If the employee's job performance does not improve following the second discussion, referral then becomes necessary.
5. The follow-up meeting is to assess progress in meeting job expectations and work performance.

The aim of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), is to help employees, not to discipline them. The Cabin Chiang Mai is working to increase

productivity and wellbeing within Australian businesses, limiting the damage caused by alcohol and drug misuse.

Editor's Notes:

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- Website: www.thecabinchiangmai.com.
- *Statistic taken from National Drug Strategy, Department of Health and Ageing, Federal Government of Australia, Canberra.