

# The true cost of substance use disorder

Substance use disorder (SUD) is something that touches us all. Whether it's due to the lasting effects of the pandemic or the pressures applied on modern society both economically and emotionally, SUD is on the rise. Especially in the workplace. In fact, 70% of people suffering from SUD are employed, and studies suggest that there has been a 30% increase in substance use overall since 2020.<sup>1</sup> These numbers are eye opening and should make us think about the true cost of SUD.



## SUD is costing employers and the workplace.

The modern work environment is changing and evolving quickly, and the pressures on employees have never been greater. Hence the rise in substance use, which in the end costs employers. The annual cost of a SUD diagnosis in 2018 for employers who self-insure was \$15,640 per affected health plan member and \$35.3 billion in the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Overall, lost productivity from SUD costs employers \$25.5 billion a year, and workers with untreated SUD miss nearly 50% more days a year than their peers.<sup>3</sup> Absenteeism from substance use isn't simply inconvenient; it creates serious productivity issues as well.

Jobs are either not being done or are not being done correctly, and employees under the influence in the workplace are a danger not only to themselves but to others. This is especially true in industries like manufacturing and transportation, where lives could be on the line. All of this may lead to employers incurring costs such as hiring replacement workers or adding to others' workloads, which makes for low morale and a less-than-optimum company culture. But the real loss is to the affected employee. Without treatment, they will struggle to reach their full potential both in the work environment and life.

According to Quit Genius, turnover is another significant issue facing employers as a direct result of SUD.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-five percent of employees report having had more than one employer in the past year. That number rises dramatically to 36% among employees with SUD. Productivity suffers when people change jobs frequently and onboarding has to happen. Replacing employees is also expensive.

From recruitment to training new employees, the cost burden for the employer is approximately 21% of a job's annual salary. No matter how you dissect the cost of SUD in the workplace, you'll see it's a problem that employers need to notice and address.

## SUD is costing us all.

While we are able to quantify what SUD costs employers and the workplace to operate, the societal costs are immeasurable. From diseases, hypertension, mental health issues, and premature death to the cost of interdiction, law enforcement, prosecution, and incarceration, society pays dearly for SUD. Consumers pay in the form of higher prices for goods and services.<sup>5</sup> Employers and employees pay higher health insurance premiums, and we all pay higher taxes for healthcare, law enforcement, and treatment programs.<sup>6</sup>

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But it's the personal costs that are the hardest to measure and heaviest to bear. Poor health, broken relationships, and financial hardships are but a few of the tolls that SUD takes. When someone has a family member suffering from SUD, it can impact their own ability to focus at work and may cause financial hardship, reduce their own job retention, and increase anxiety and depression.

Children are also adversely affected by this affliction. Many people don't realize that exposure to SUD and adverse childhood experiences is associated with increased risk for health problems across a lifespan.<sup>7</sup> The ripple effect of SUD throughout society is unmistakable and costly. But we must remember that SUD isn't the result of an individual's moral failing but is rather a chronic condition that needs to be treated.

### Contigo Health offers a revolutionary new approach to treating SUD.

The costs of SUD both financially and emotionally are alarming—so alarming that they inspired us to react with a revolutionary new approach to treating it. Our program is designed to be everything traditional care isn't. It's discreet, allowing employees to work without having to share personal struggles with their employer in industries that don't have mandatory drug screening. It allows a person to continue on with their life while seeking treatment. And it's accepting, welcoming all with open arms, with special consideration for members of the LGBTQ+ community and diverse populations.

### What makes our SUD treatment program so unique?

We offer immediate support, 24/7. After an initial triage call and determination is made about the right level of treatment, health plan members are referred to licensed counselors for a detailed assessment. Then the health plan member will begin receiving treatment from one of our trusted partners.

For outpatient care there's Lionrock Behavioral Health, Inc., who pioneered virtual outpatient SUD treatment and continues to lead the way in virtual care with great success. If in-person treatment is needed, we offer access to our world-class partner Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation.

Everyone has a different need. What makes our SUD program so unique, aside from its superior support, is that a health plan member can access the full spectrum of care within one program and within multiple modalities.

Now virtual care from home can happen, which removes the barrier of access and allows for far less life disruption. One-on-one sessions, support groups, and group sessions can all be handled outside of work with virtual treatments, so the person doesn't have to leave their family or job.

No matter the treatment, our program wraps its arms around the individual and gives them high-quality care and social support, surrounding them with a success-driven team that's with them all the way.

This team of professionals will help continue treatment for however long it's needed to achieve success and maintain recovery. This revolutionary way of treating plan members is a part of our Centers of Excellence transformation. We call it Contigo Health Centers of Excellence 360™, a first-of-its-kind, guided comprehensive care journey. It's the next phase in making plan member care more accessible and effective.

The cost of SUD in the workplace is something that forward-thinking employers know they must address with new and innovative treatment options. To that end, the number of employers offering Centers of Excellence for SUD leapt from 20% in 2022 to 34% in 2023, and another 19% might implement it in 2024.<sup>8</sup> But while SUD's impact on the workplace is measurable in dollars and cents, it's the impact SUD has on the lives of employees and dependents that makes up the real cost. And it's this real cost, this immeasurable cost, that drives us to find and offer more revolutionary treatment to help get people back to living their best, most productive lives possible.

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