



Supporting Recovery Through RTW

FHA & CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY REHABILITATION PLAN
VICKY WALDRON

Opioid Epidemic & Construction Workers



- ▶ BC Coroners Review 2017
 - ▶ Disproportionate representation
 - ▶ 55% of those that died worked in the trades
- ▶ Large US studies supported data
 - ▶ Construction workers 5-7 times more likely to die in opioid epidemic
 - ▶ Pain a major factor



- ▶ **2016** CIRP approached FHA to explore RTW as a pathway to improve recovery from SUD
 - ▶ 3 year journey exploring RTW
 - ▶ Review of current jurisdictional practices
 - ▶ Identifying 'enablers' & 'Barriers'
 - ▶ Comprehensive Literature Review

- ▶ **2020** MHO Report - *"...From consultations with stakeholders in construction, **Return to Work (RTW)** was identified as **a key component of long-term recovery** and a period identified as **high potential for decreasing overdose risk**, giving workers an opportunity to reintegrate into their workplace after a period of intensive recovery engagement..."*

Exploring RTW as a Pathway to Reducing ODs



Methodology

- ▶ Key informant interviews
- ▶ Environmental Scan
 - ▶ Unionised & Non-unionized
 - ▶ British Columbia; Alberta; Ontario
- ▶ Literature Review

Key Findings



1. Prevalence

- ▶ Men working in trades are over-represented in Opioid Epidemic
- ▶ Contributing factors: “work hard play hard” culture
- ▶ Chronic pain linked to SUD

2. Stigma

- ▶ Workers face significant shame & stigma issues
- ▶ MHSU issues seen as “moral failings”
- ▶ Often an outdated understanding of MHSU
- ▶ Fear of “profound” repercussions

Key Findings Cont...



3. Lack of Awareness for Treatment Options

- ▶ Industry wide 'lack of knowledge' around tx options
- ▶ How treatment works
- ▶ Wage indemnity
- ▶ Human rights protection & confidentiality
- ▶ Provincial services / industry services

Key Findings Cont...



4. Financial Implications

- ▶ High Income Industry – no protection when off work
- ▶ Financial losses drive high drop out rate from treatment (both inpatient & outpatient)
 - ▶ Wage Indemnity not sufficient to cover losses
 - ▶ Many workers use limited sick time to access treatment options

Key Findings Cont...



5. Lack of Structured RTW Programs

- ▶ Limited experience within industry for structured RTW programs relating directly to MHSU issues
- ▶ Manage complex RTW transitions *ad-hoc*
- ▶ Structured RTW processes would offer transparency and clarity
- ▶ Lack of clear MHSU policies/procedures
- ▶ Lack of key elements of a robust RTW

Key Findings Cont...



6. Unions Unaware When Many Workers In Treatment

- ▶ Due to stigma workers often attend treatment during their 'down-time'
- ▶ Many Workers don't disclose why they are using 'sick time' – choosing to forgo WI
- ▶ Unions – missed opportunities to provide support

7. Lack of specialized training for managerial staff

- ▶ Despite high prevalence there is widespread lack of knowledge
- ▶ Education would ameliorate existing stigma within the industry

Key Findings Cont...



8. Provincial Differences

- ▶ Widely varying approaches to treatment of MHSU within the unionized sector
 - ▶ Alberta – focused on testing and pre-access testing
 - ▶ Ontario – predominantly 12-step abstinence



Best Practices & Guidelines

1. Workplace Policies & Culture
 - ▶ Introduction of destigmatizing language
 - ▶ Psychoeducational training around the psychobiosocial basis of substance use
 - ▶ Clear policies on MHSU to support RTW
 - ▶ Policies that are non punitive
2. Mental Health Expertise and Connections
 - ▶ Training for those in leadership/management roles on how to identify issues of MHSU
 - ▶ Training on resources and how/where to refer



Best Practices & Guidelines Cont...

3. RTW Enhancements

- ▶ RTW can be improved through:
 - ▶ reviewing current RTW policy,
 - ▶ enhancing the policy, and
 - ▶ creating a supportive workplace culture with a commitment to supporting worker recovery



Conclusion

1. Employment is a key determinant of health.
2. Workplaces are important settings for preventing disability and disease and for promoting healthy behaviours. Healthy, safe workplaces are productive workplaces.
3. Mental health is an indispensable component of a worker's overall health and wellness.
 - ▶ To date, much of the dialogue concerning health and wellness in the construction industry has been focused on physical wellness, particularly the management of chronic musculoskeletal injuries, leaving mental health largely absent from the conversation.
4. The overdose crisis has impacted men working in construction substantially. RTW has been identified as a key area for the industry to assess.
 - ▶ Current RTW practices in the industry were identified through an environmental scan and it is apparent there are wide variations in RTW across the industry.
 - ▶ Given developments in the evidence for managing mental health and substance use issues in the workplace, there are promising practices that can be incorporated to help support RTW for workers, which can help improve both mental and physical health and safety in workplaces.

Conclusion



5. Current RTW practices in the industry were identified through an environmental scan and it is apparent there are wide variations in RTW across the industry.
6. Given developments in the evidence for managing mental health and substance use issues in the workplace, there are promising practices that can be incorporated to help support RTW for workers, which can help improve both mental and physical health and safety in workplaces.

THANK YOU

