

MODEL WORKPLACE POLICY: Substance Use–Related Code of Conduct

PURPOSE

Establish standards of conduct for our interactions and relationships at work, as they relate to substance use and its intersections.

SCOPE

This Code applies to:

- + everyone who works for and with the Organization; and
- + the Organization itself.

AUTHORS

This document was compiled by leadership of the following organizations:

- + EACH+EVERY: Businesses for Harm Reduction
- + Portage Legal Services
- + Workers for Ethical Substance Use Policy (WESUP).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Code was informed by the lived experience of people who use drugs, frontline harm reduction workers, and academics across Canada. Several elements have been adapted from Harm Reduction at Work: A Guide for Organizations Employing People Who Use Drugs, authored by Raffi Balian and Cheryl White and published by the Open Society Foundations in 2010.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

The way we treat each other is key to our individual and collective health, wellbeing, and success at work. The following standards of conduct govern our workplace interactions and relationships as they relate to substance use.

1. Trust and respect, not judgement.

We will value the unique expertise, leadership and perspectives that people who use substances bring to the workforce. We will foster respectful relationships between employees who use substances and those who do not. We will provide education and training to our employees to counter societal stigma and discrimination against people who use substances.

We will not make assumptions about people who use legal or illegal substances based on misconceptions, stereotypes and prejudice.

2. Science, not stigma.

We will recognize that the potential benefits and harms of using legal or illegal substances occur on a spectrum, and the harms are often a result of public policy, not the substances themselves. We endorse science-based, secular, trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, harm-reducing and health-promoting approaches to addressing substance use and substance use challenges.

We will not assume that employees who use legal or illegal substances or have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder are unable to carry out the duties of their job safely and competently.

3. Autonomy and consent, not coercion.

We will respect employees' autonomy to make voluntary and confidential decisions relating to their use of legal or illegal substances and their use of substance use health care services.

We will not require employees to submit to any health care intervention as a condition of continued employment and will not interfere with employees' personal and private health care decisions.

4. Support, not punishment.

We will help employees remain in the workplace by accommodating their limitations and facilitating access to optional, employee-driven health care services. We will provide access to paid leave up to ___ weeks for employees who are unable to work due to substance use challenges, or who choose to take time off work to seek support. We will create a supportive workplace for employees with children, regardless of their current or former substance use.

We will not attach conditions to employment based on employees' use of legal or illegal substances or being diagnosed with a substance use disorder. We will not judge or punish employees who may experience adverse effects from medications they use to treat substance use disorder or withdrawal symptoms from reducing or discontinuing substance use.

5. Supervision, not monitoring.

We will ensure employees are able to carry out their responsibilities safely and competently, and when this is in question, we will support them to take time off work as necessary and return to work when ready.

We will not attempt to determine which employees use legal or illegal substances. We will not require employees to submit to medical exams to assess for substance use disorder. We will not require employees to submit to drug testing and will not monitor employees' adherence to any health care regime. We will not allow employees to remain in the workplace when their ability to carry out the duties of their job safely is impaired.

6. Managing risk, not mandating abstinence.

We will reinforce good job performance and professional behavior. We will address employee substance use with the same care and consideration as any other factors (such as health conditions, injuries, and fatigue) that have the potential to impact workplace safety.

We will not reinforce abstinence as a measure of success or a necessary target of any intervention intended to address substance use.

7. Removing barriers, not creating them.

We will respect employees' privacy and ability to make their own health care decisions. We will offer employees' non-judgmental support. We will accommodate medical appointments during work hours for the treatment of substance use disorder, including daily clinic or pharmacy visits.

We will not require employees to accept support for substance use challenges as a condition of continued employment. We will not discourage or prevent employees from addressing substance use challenges with the approach they feel is best for them.

8. Humility and self-awareness.

We will listen to and make space for one another, seeking to understand and adjust in consideration of each other's needs, concerns, and experiences. We will use the principles of cultural safety and humility in our interactions with each other.

We will not reject dialogue or make negative assumptions about each other's motives and intentions in navigating workplace interactions and relationships.

9. Anti-discrimination.

We will incorporate an understanding that punitive drug policies are rooted in and enforced with racism. We will recognize that racialized people, women, and 2SLGBTQIA people face discrimination in the workplace and the healthcare system. We will recognize that substance use support services were traditionally developed by and for white heterosexual Christian men. We will ensure that our workplace is a safe space for everyone. We will only endorse substance use health care services that are inclusive and welcoming to all people.

We will not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment, bullying, abuse, or violence within our organization. We will not endorse or reinforce the philosophies of substance use healthcare services that discriminate against or cause harm to any group of people.

10. Truth and Reconciliation.

We will recognize that substance use challenges are often a result of inequality and trauma caused by racist and harmful government policy and colonial systems. We will recognize that punitive drug policies target and harm Indigenous people, and there is anti-Indigenous systemic racism, inequity, and discrimination in all areas of society including health care systems. We will interact with each other using the principles of cultural humility and safety. We will inform employees of Indigenous-led substance use services as well as Indigenous Patient Navigator Programs. We will adhere to Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action #92.

We will not assume that Indigenous peoples are a monolith or ignore that local relationships can help inform what is harmful to a community. We will not tokenize or trivialize consultation with local communities when exploring potential harms and mitigation strategies.

11. Trauma-informed.

We will integrate an understanding of the effects of past, current and intergenerational experiences of trauma. We will recognize that trauma can be a root cause of substance use challenges. We will foster physical, psychological and cultural safety within our organization and interact with each other in a trauma-sensitive manner. We will facilitate access to voluntary trauma support services. We will consider voluntary peer support and mutual self-help as integral to the organizational and service delivery approach with the understanding that this can build trust and establish safety and empowerment.

We will not ignore systemic issues, including working conditions within our organization, that can lead to traumatic experiences, psychological injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use challenges. We will not stigmatize or punish people living with mental health challenges including substance use challenges.

12. Harm reduction.

We will provide information to employees on how to reduce the potential harms of substance use as a part of workplace orientation and throughout employment. We will provide information to employees on how to access naloxone kits, drug checking services, overdose prevention/supervised consumption sites, overdose prevention phone lines or apps, and safer alternatives to the unpredictable, toxic, unregulated and criminalized drug supply. We will ensure overdose prevention and response is part of our first aid response, and we will offer training to employees. We will ensure that a naloxone kit is readily available in the workplace at all times.

We will not discourage or prevent employees from using a harm reduction approach to substance use.

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