

Checklist for Workplace Policies on Substance Use Stigma

Help improve workplace efforts to reduce substance use and impairment by removing substance use stigma and discrimination from workplace policies.

“Stigma is any attitude, belief or behaviour that discriminates against people.”
Overcoming Stigma Through Language: A Primer

Do your workplace policies:

- Avoid **stigmatizing or discriminatory** language?
Replace terms such as abuse, abuser, addict or alcoholic with neutral terms such as use of substances, individuals who use substances, person who drinks alcohol, person who takes potentially impairing medications, etc.
- Define and use the term **substance use**?
When explicitly defined and used, the term substance use helps signal to employees that use of any potentially impairing substance (e.g., cold medications, occasional heavy drinking, prescription medications, etc.) applies to them. A clear definition should provide different examples of substance use that could lead to impairment.
- Acknowledge **various forms of impairment**?
Lack of sleep, stress, mental health challenges (e.g., anxiety, depression, etc.) and other issues have the potential to impair employees. A policy that covers impairment generally and explores substance use as one type of impairment alongside others can help reduce stigma and discrimination.
- Recognize the **legal status** of substance use disorders?
In the workplace context, a diagnosed substance use disorder must be treated like other diagnosed medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, diabetes, etc.) and cannot be discriminated against. Ensure policies recognize this [legal status](#).
- Inform employees about **accommodation** and **return-to-duty or work** options?
Employers are legally required to accommodate diagnosed medical conditions (up to undue hardship), including substance use disorders. Ensure that policies mention accommodation of substance use disorders.
- Inform employees about the **availability of resources** for more information or help?
Ensure that policies make employees aware of any company benefits and where to find information for **anonymous and confidential** health services (e.g., human resources, bulletin board, website, etc.).

To learn more about stigma, [click here](#) or visit [ccsa.ca/stigma](https://www.ccsa.ca/stigma)
For a substance use and the workplace toolkit, [click here](#) or visit [ccsa.ca/workplace-safety](https://www.ccsa.ca/workplace-safety)