

## FAQs: An Employer Guide to Substance Misuse

December 6, 2024

*This toolkit was designed by United Way of Northwest Vermont to support Vermont employers in promoting healthy and safe workplaces by addressing substance misuse through developing preventive policies and managing its impact. The free toolkit is available online at [bit.ly/substance-misuse-toolkit](https://bit.ly/substance-misuse-toolkit).*

**How did this toolkit come about?** United Way's Working Bridges, a program of United Way of Northwest Vermont and Green Mountain United Way, partners with Vermont employers to improve job retention, stability and advancement by supporting employees with community resources. Working Bridges has supported several local employers whose employees and workplaces have been directly impacted by substance misuse. Employers were seeking guidance in how to address substance misuse. In addition, Vermont's recent legalization of cannabis raised questions about workplace practices and policies.

Working Bridges had previous experience developing an employer toolkit for supporting employee mental health. United Way of Northwest Vermont was able to access funding to create an employer guide for substance misuse modeled after the mental health toolkit from the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Substance Use, in United Way's role as a Lead Prevention Organization. Additional funding was provided by the University of Vermont Medical Center's Community Health Investment Fund.

**Who was involved in developing this toolkit?** The development of An Employment Guide to Substance Misuse was a collaborative process co-led by United Way's Working Bridges Director Connie Beal and Prevention Works!VT's Director of Programs Beth Shrader with participation of a workgroup made up of Vermont employers and community organizations focused on substance misuse prevention and recovery.

The workgroup was facilitated by consultant Bryan O'Connor and coordinated by Adrienne Lueders-Dumont, United Way of Northwest Vermont's Senior Communications Coordinator. Workgroup participants included: Tammy Bushell of Edlund Corporation, Tawyna Kristen of Green Mountain United Way, Jody Lantman of Rhino Foods, Lisa Lord of Recovery Vermont, and Evelyn Sikorski of UVMMC's Employee Assistance Program.

Hilary Denton, Mary Pickener, Nicholas Tatakis, and Sean Campbell from the Vermont Department of Health and Reid Wobby, a drug and alcohol consultant who works closely with the Department of Health, provided additional content and guidance.

**What is the intention of this toolkit?** This toolkit was not created to educate employers; they are well aware of the issue and see the impacts of substance misuse in the workplace just as we all do in our communities. The toolkit was created to help employers destigmatize conversations about substance misuse in the workplace, to know where to turn in figuring out how to address it and learn how to go upstream by creating policies and practices that promote prevention and support healthy, safe workplaces. The intention of the toolkit is also to share the best practices and successful strategies and innovations that some Vermont workplaces have already put in place. We know employers care about this issue and want to support their employees and the community. The toolkit is a way to share learning, begin conversations, and provide guidance and resources.

**How should this toolkit be used?** This toolkit is not designed to be proscriptive. It is meant to be used for discussion and learning and to cultivate dialogue about prevention strategies at work. Workplaces can think of this toolkit as a starting point. There are several resources provided for employers to explore and adapt depending on the specific needs of their workplace and employees. The intention is to set organizations up to be ready for individual needs as they arise related to keeping their employees safe and healthy.

**Why does the toolkit use the term “substance misuse” and what is meant by that term?**

"Substance misuse" refers to use of substances in a way that is harmful for the person and/or those around them, is inappropriate for the context, and/or is illegal. The toolkit includes definitions of commonly used terms and how those terms are being used throughout the toolkit.

**What if my organization has questions and/or needs other resources to effectively utilize the toolkit?** United Way wants to know what other resources organizations need to promote healthy and safe workplaces. If you have questions and/or feedback, [please use this form](#) and someone will follow up with you.