

# ADDICTION IN THE WORKPLACE

## A FRIENDLY GUIDE FOR MANAGERS AND BUSINESS OWNERS

### WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Addiction is a harmful pattern of using something to the extent that it causes us significant distress and affects our day-to-day functioning. This could be a substance, like alcohol, cannabis or methamphetamine, or an activity, like gambling or porn.

You can't always know if a team member is experiencing addiction, but you may have noticed changes, such as:

- 🌀 Drop in performance
- 🌀 Absences
- 🌀 Unusual behaviour
- 🌀 Complaints about feeling exhausted all the time
- 🌀 Significant weight loss or gain
- 🌀 Untidy appearance
- 🌀 Secrecy about the activities and whereabouts outside of work
- 🌀 More sensitive or withdrawn
- 🌀 Financial issues



### UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

When we experience addiction, our use of the substance or activity can feel out of control. We struggle to reduce or stop using, even when we want to. Often, this is driven by a need to escape emotional or physical discomfort. Over time, addictive behaviour can turn into a vicious cycle.

### THE SCOPE OF ADDICTION IN AOTEAROA

- 🌀 New Zealand has high rates of alcohol and recreational drug use. **93%** of adults report alcohol use at some point, and **43%** report recreational drug use, e.g. cannabis
- 🌀 Harmful drinking affects **1 in 5** adults
- 🌀 About 50,000 New Zealanders seek support for substance use annually



## MANAGING HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS

- ☆ **Safety first:** Prioritise the safety of all kaimahi (staff). Consider adjusting job responsibilities while the person is in recovery i.e., “temporary reasonable accommodations”.
- ☆ **Professional help:** Encourage the individual to connect with loved ones and to seek professional assistance.
- ☆ **Clear policies:** Establish and communicate policies regarding workplace behaviours and substance use. Document your actions and maintain clear workplace behaviour standards.
- ☆ **Support:** Navigate challenges with care and confidence by getting assistance like a MindMatters Clinic assessment, HR professional consult, or legal advice.

## SUPPORTING A TEAM MEMBER THROUGH ADDICTION

**Empathy:** Approach the conversation with empathy rather than judgment. Share what you have noticed and ask if they are OK and if there is an issue if they have sought help.

**Confidentiality:** Respect privacy and build trust. Only involve others when you have to, e.g., if there are safety concerns, and if this happens try to do this collaboratively with the person.

**Boundaries:** Maintain confidentiality but avoid enabling harmful behaviour. Be clear about workplace expectations and safety.

*Keep in mind that recovery can be a challenging journey, but with the right support system at work, individuals can navigate their path to wellness with confidence, knowing their team supports them.*

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**Supporting addiction recovery is a team effort. Create a supportive work environment that accommodates recovery needs, such as flexible schedules for therapy. Encourage the use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and other support services, e.g.,**

**1737 Need to Talk 24/7 free call/txt**  
**AA.org.nz**  
**NA.org.nz**  
**<https://gamblinghelpline.co.nz/>**  
**<https://alcoholdrughelp.org.nz/>**