

Supporting Employees with Addiction Through Cost-Sharing Recovery Program and Back-to-Work Supports



Overview

BC Hydro is owned by the people of British Columbia, and they want their workforce to reflect the diversity of the province. Their employees have expressed that diversity and inclusion are important values to them, and they are proud to support their employees and their families with various accessibility initiatives, including the development and revamp of their Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Program.

BC Hydro supports employees through cost-sharing of the program, and implementing back-to-work supports to ensure a successful transition back into the workforce upon return from the program. This program is aligned with BC Hydro's safety-first policy, as it encourages disclosure, and therefore mitigates safety concerns related to untreated addiction challenges. It is also important in retaining employees post treatment.

Objectives

In developing their Addiction Recovery Program, BC Hydro's objectives were to:

- Ensure that employees were supported to be their best, most productive self.
- Encourage disclosure from employees facing addiction challenges.
- Develop a company-wide understanding that addiction challenges are akin to other health and medical challenges in that they require acknowledgement, treatment, and ongoing self- management.
- Mitigate the safety risks associated with untreated addiction challenges.
- Retain employees post treatment.

Approach

Prior to the revamp and development of the new Addiction Recovery Program, BC Hydro was utilizing a third-party service provider to help employees manage challenges and seek treatment options relating to all forms of sick leave, including those involving alcohol and drug addiction challenges. However, upon review of their process, BC Hydro discovered they wanted to be more directly engaged in managing sick leave for staff.

BC Hydro took the following approach:

- Assessed the potential risks for employees suffering from addiction.
- Reviewed the return on investment in bringing the program in house.
- Put a proposal forward to the executive team.
- Worked with the unions on implementation.
- Created awareness of the recovery services available.
- Shared stories from people who had been through the program and successfully returned to work.

Assessing the Potential Risks

BC Hydro's focus on safety inspired them to assess the potential risks for employees suffering from addiction, if it went untreated. What they discovered is that left untreated, the risk to an employee could be significant and possibly fatal. BC Hydro also came to understand that the particular nature of some of their roles, such as their trades-based roles that worked in remote communities across the province, were more at risk for addiction related issues. The increased risk comes from factors such as isolation, or due to the increased risk of injury—pain management can lead to problematic substance use in some cases.

Reviewing the Return on Investment

Bringing the program in house, and running it on a cost share model of 75% BC Hydro, 25% Employee, meant that there were larger short-term costs associated with the program. However, in assessing the ROI, BC Hydro came to the conclusion that the potential catastrophic results of not addressing the challenges of addiction had far more dire consequences, and therefore the cost was well worth the potential outcome to the employee and in growing its safety-first culture.

Working with Unions on Implementation

To ensure that employees were fully supported in accessing the addiction recovery program, BC Hydro's HR team worked with operations management and the unions to ensure referrals were being made to all members experiencing addiction challenges.

Created Awareness

A key part of this initiative continues to be creating awareness of the program and services available with managers, the unions, the HR team and the executive members. Awareness was created by talking about the program in various meetings, as well as highlighting it in all-employee emails. Awareness of the program was also heightened through management training, and by working with the union closely, union counsellors were also well-versed in the program.

Share Success Stories

Recently, the project has evolved and employees who have gone through the program and successfully returned to work are sharing their experiences with others. Employees sharing stories with each other has helped reduce the stigma associated with drug and alcohol addiction, and allow a safe space at work for people to talk about what they are dealing with.

Outcomes

The program has continued to evolve since inception and the outcomes that have been realized include:

- Employees report feeling supported after coming forward and self-disclosing addiction challenges. There is no stigma associated in asking for assistance.
- 123 individuals over a 14-year period have utilized the program since its development, and 61% of individuals have returned to work and are still employed by BC Hydro. This is consistent with retention statistics for all employees, indicating that this program is successful in maintaining retention rates.
- Only 13% of those that went through the program left BC Hydro for reasons other than: end of contract, retirement, or resignation.
- Employees have come forward to share their own stories about how the addiction recovery period has impacted their life and help to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and addiction.



Lessons Learned

BC Hydro learned a lot during the development and implementation of this program, and a few of the key learnings are listed below:

Personal Readiness for Change

During the phase where BC Hydro was reviewing cases on an individual basis, it became clear that the cost sharing model was key to ensuring there was a personal commitment to the addiction recovery program. BC Hydro continues to pay 75% of the costs associated with program to affirm their commitment to the employee's recovery.

Prevention Based Approach

By mitigating risks ahead of a crisis occurring, BC Hydro is protecting both the interests of the employee and the business, in a preventative way. Other preventative services include counselling through the employee assistance programs, self-directed risk assessments and tutorials, and coverage for registered clinical councillors through its paramedical benefit.

Dealing with Privacy Based Concerns


While privacy continues to be a focus for BC Hydro during the implementation of this program, privacy concerns need to be balanced with safety concerns for the individual in the program. The manager of the individual in the program needs to be aware of the employee's reason for absence to ensure the employee's safety when they return to work.

Return to Work as a Focus

Equally as important as the employee receiving treatment, is ensuring the employee can return to work in a safe and productive way. This might mean placing the employee within a different team in the organization, adjusting working hours or workload, or other accommodations to ensure a smooth transition back to work. BC Hydro also supports post-treatment monitoring for all employees in safety sensitive roles.

Working Collaboratively

For BC Hydro, part of the success of the program is ensuring that the executive team, managers, the HR department and the union are all



working together to better serve employees and ensure a cohesive approach to that support.

Next Steps

BC Hydro has seen tremendous success from the implementation of this program and will continue to support employees facing addiction related challenges. Their focus in the next year will be to continue to raise awareness about the program, share success stories of employees who have utilized the services offered, and tie the program into an overall strategy related to mental health.