

Focus on Recovery

ONDCP Invites EAPs to Support Initiative

“The adoption of recovery in recent years has signaled a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and/or substance use conditions.”

By Tamara Cagney

There are over 23 million Americans in recovery from addiction to alcohol and other drugs. Recovery advocates believe that times are changing and that having a visible and vocal focus on recovery is imperative.

Deputy Director David Mineta from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) offered remarks and insights in one of the keynotes at the 2014 World EAP Conference in Orlando. He discussed some of the changes at ONDCP, which included the announcement of a new director and an increased focus on recovery.

Michael Botticelli is the director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, an office informally known as the “drug czar.” Botticelli, 57, is the first person in substance-abuse recovery to hold this position. He has remained abstinent for 26 years. His history, far from the liability it once may have been, is considered evidence that the government is moving toward addressing drug abuse more through healing than through handcuffs.

New Focus on Recovery

ONDCP advises the president and coordinates drug-control activities and funding across the government and has historically been run by people with military, police or political backgrounds. The Obama Administration broke with that tradition when it appointed Botticelli, a recovering alcoholic who has worked extensively in drug treatment and who knows addiction firsthand.

We are seeing the impact of Botticelli’s focus, as supporting recovery is a significant part of the Administration’s national drug policy. In fact the policy is featured in a number of federal action items including:

- * Expanding the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Access to Recovery program;
- * Reviewing laws and regulations that impede recovery from addiction;
- * Fostering the expansion of community-based recovery support programs, including recovery schools, peer-led programs, mutual help groups, and recovery support centers; and
- * Delivering quality recovery support services to veterans and military families.

The adoption of recovery in recent years has signaled a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and/or substance use conditions. Today, when individuals with mental and/or substance use disorders seek help, they are met with the knowledge and belief that anyone can recover and/or manage their condition(s) successfully.

SAMHSA has established a working definition of recovery that defines it as a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. Recovery is built on access to evidence-based clinical treatment and recovery support services for all populations.

Major Factors of Recovery

SAMHSA has delineated four major factors that support a life in recovery:

- * **Health** — overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms. For example, abstain from using alcohol, illicit drugs, and non-prescribed medications if one has an addiction problem. This includes making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being;
- * **Home** — having a stable and safe place to live;
- * **Purpose** — conducting meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school volunteerism, family caregiving, and the independence, income, and resources to participate in society; and
- * **Community** — having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

In addition, hope, the belief that these challenges and conditions can be overcome, is the foundation of recovery. An individual’s recovery is built on his or her strengths, talents, coping abilities, resources, and inherent values. A recovery focus is holistic, addresses the entire person and the community, and is supported by employers, peers, friends, and family members.

The Role of EAP in Recovery

Employee assistance and peer-assistance programs are seen as integral parts of support in recovery, and the ONDCP understands EAP’s role in supporting recovering individuals in the workplace. The bottom line: Work is an important part of long-term addiction recovery. EAPs have always recognized this fact, and helped employees take action so they can get back to work as soon as possible.

EA professionals understand that if an employee is actively participating in a recovery program they are likely to be more accountable, take fewer sick days, and work harder. Of course, EAPs are also aware of the challenges of recovery in the workplace. Ideally, every employer would be educated about addiction and would treat addiction just like any other disease. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case. The negative stigma surrounding recovery and the workplace remains strong.

Barriers to Recovery

Recovering employees struggle with a variety of issues related to recovery in the workplace including:

- * *Self-disclosure* can be a tricky issue but EA professionals are in a position to help those in recovery sort through the pros and cons of their specific situation. However, it’s hard to return to work after being in treatment and not feel sensitive to the reactions of co-workers and managers. It’s human nature to react to others’ opinions. Many EA professionals recommend that employees tell co-workers and managers only that they are glad to be back and are ready to work. Historically recovery has been viewed as private and not related to work. This may change over time as people begin to identify more with recovery instead of the disease of addiction.

- * *Time*, and for some the recovery process takes longer than others, but time is something that can weigh heavily on those who are returning to work. The feeling of needing to make up for all that lost time can be a trap, but EA professionals can help employees not to fall into it. If employees avoid taking time off or put in too many hours in the frantic attempt to regain the time they have lost, they may be setting themselves up for frustration, exhaustion, and potential mistakes or failures.

- * *Regaining trust* often involves trying to prove themselves to others when they go back to work. A recovering employee may feel that everyone is watching, expecting them to make a mistake or start using again. EA professionals can help recovering employees pace themselves, schedule projects and ask for help. Return-to-work recovery agreements can help provide the structure some employees need in early recovery and help them get back on track.

- * *Work-life balance* is yet another challenge. Taking work home is a dangerous temptation for everyone in recovery. They will need to clearly separate work time from home time. Overlap is not healthy for the

simple reason that the tendency will be to choose one over the other. EA professionals help employees understand that if they bring work home on a regular basis, they may eventually be ignoring responsibilities and involvement with family and commitment to recovery activities and support.

* *Determining if they want to go back to the same job.* Recovery is an ongoing process and people change during that time. EAPs can be vital in helping employees recognize that recovery is worth making the effort to find a job they truly enjoy, one that they're good at, and one that provides commensurate rewards.

How EAP can Get Involved in Recovery Effort

The ONDCP is encouraging EAPs to play a visible and vocal role in the support of and development of recovery and the recovery movement. Here are some possibilities for your EAP to consider

Participate in [Recovery Month](#): ONDCP invites EAPs to participate in the planning for National Recovery Month, which takes place every September. ONDCP efforts sponsor, lead, and participate in numerous events, such as marches, rallies, runs, bicycle rides, motorcycle rallies, picnics, and speaking engagements. You can too! To find events near you or to sponsor one check the [Recovery Month](#) website <http://www.recoverymonth.gov/>.

Join or start a local recovery community organization (RCO). An RCO is an independent, non-profit organization led and governed by people in recovery and their allies. RCOs rely heavily on volunteers. RCOs are the heart and soul of the recovery movement. In the last ten years, RCOs have proliferated throughout the US. They have become major hubs for recovery-focused policy advocacy activities, carrying out recovery-focused community education and outreach programs, and becoming players in systems change initiatives.

Many are also providing peer-based recovery support services. RCOs are independent, share a vision, and serve as a bridge between diverse communities of recovery. This includes addiction treatment community, employers, governmental agencies and the broader support resources of the extended community. They educate the community, provide services to people in the early stages of recovery, and advocate for policies that are supportive of recovery.

Join a national organization that supports recovery-oriented policies and programs such as <http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/>.

Finally, **always include a discussion about recovery** in all alcohol and other drug trainings in the workplace. The *Anonymous People* documentary is a great way to educate employees about recovery. Check out <http://manyfaces1voice.org>.

Summary

As stated, the adoption of recovery in recent years has signaled a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and/or substance use conditions. The ONDCP has asked for the support of the EA profession in supporting this change. EA practitioners involved in substance use addiction and recovery, need to ask themselves what they will do to promote this initiative?

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