



Providing Employment Services in Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Programs: Responses to COVID-19

Presented by:

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Program Context

- Many communities face a crisis stemming from widespread substance misuse, particularly opioids
- Employment is a critical factor in sustaining people's recovery and buffering relapse, particularly for low-income populations
- Increasing interest in programs that integrate substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and recovery with employment services
- With COVID-19, programs faced new challenges including increase in substance misuse, dramatic increases in employment, and shift to virtual services

About This Study

- Examined operational experiences of seven programs combining SUD treatment and recovery and employment services in the initial months of COVID-19
- Based on phone interviews with program staff in summer of 2020
- Part of OPRE's Building Evidence on Employment Strategies project and includes programs participating in that study

What is BEES?

The BEES study intends to build critical evidence on promising interventions designed to promote employment, upward mobility, economic security, and family well-being among various populations.

BEES is part of OPRE's [Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio](#), which seeks to rigorously evaluate the "next generation" of employment strategies and is partnering with the Social Security Administration on select evaluations.

Who is the BEES Study Team?

Sponsored By:

- Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Social Security Administration (SSA)

Conducted By:

- MDRC, in partnership with
 - MEF Associates
 - Abt Associates

What Programs Were Included in the Study?

Access to
Recovery Program
(across MA)

Addiction
Recovery Care
(Louisia, KY)

Avivo
(Minneapolis,
MN)

Central City
Concern
(Seattle, WA)

Community
Recovery Program
(Martinsville, VA)

IKRON
(Cincinnati, OH)

Women in
Recovery
(Tulsa, OK)

About the Programs

Service strategies varied across the programs. Services included:

- A range of employment services: occupational training, job readiness, job search assistance
- Either residential or non-residential treatment and recovery services

Adapting SUD Treatment and Recovery Services during COVID-19

Key Challenges

- Considered an “essential service,” adaptations needed to keep facilities and program offices open and safe from virus outbreaks
- Continuing medical and clinical services, including Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)
- Loss of in-person interaction difficult for the treatment community, where peer support and group interactions are cornerstone of service delivery

Adaptation to SUD Treatment and Recovery Services

- Ensuring physical safety in residential settings (distancing, testing, limiting common spaces)
- Securing appropriate devices to access virtual platforms
- Building community virtually
- Providing flexibility in MAT administration
- Using telehealth for clinical appointments, including mobile apps
- Developing new partnerships to address challenges (quarantine housing, testing)

Adapting Employment Services

Key Challenges

- Need to develop virtual training platforms and curricula that worked online
- Lack of computers or reliable internet access for both staff and participants
- Rapidly shifting economy with high levels of unemployment in early months of pandemic
- Some employment barriers exacerbated – particularly childcare
- Safety concerns about returning to a workplace

Adaptations to Employment Services

- Some emphasis on job placement rather than occupational training
- Switch to virtual or hybrid training, with some unanticipated benefits
- Shift in focus to placement and training in industries with increased job openings
- Provision of personal protective equipment to address workplace safety issues

Concluding Remarks

- Programs consistently responded quickly and creatively to address challenges that arose due to pandemic
- Virtual services have become common, but the vulnerable populations served by these programs less likely to have technology and skills needed to fully engage
- Specific guidance and resources to maintain virtual service quality may be needed
- Concerns about long-run employment prospects and addressing economic inequities driven by pandemic remain



Questions
&
Answers