![The Standard]

Employee Challenges with Substance Abuse

Substance Abuse Challenges

As stressful events and uncertainty add more disruption and stress to people's lives, behavioral health conditions are receiving more attention. These conditions affect people across ages, industries and organizations. And they are likely affecting a significant number of employees, whether organizations understand how best to respond.

But mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, aren't the only factors when it comes to behavioral health. **Other key struggles are substance abuse and addiction, which often accompany other challenges.**

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To learn more about how behavioral health conditions — including substance abuse and addiction — affect employees and workplaces, The Standard conducted the Behavioral Health Impact Study. In this report, we'll show how substance abuse challenges are affecting workforces, the impact they're having on organizations, and what employers can do to foster a healthy, supportive workplace that's good for employees and for business.

2 out of 5

39% of U.S. workers suffer from mental health issues*

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS WITH **MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES** WHO ALSO REPORTED SUFFERING FROM **AN ADDICTION**

WORKERS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES   31%
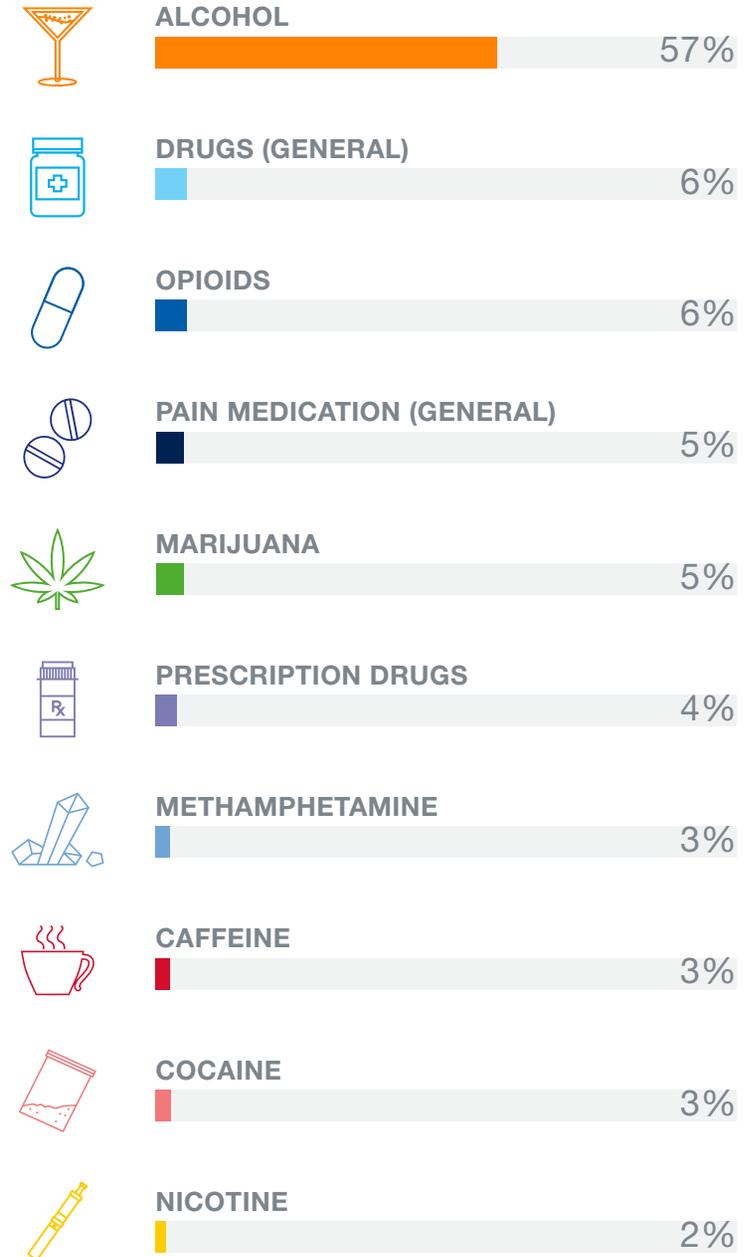
WORKERS WITH MODERATE MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES   20%
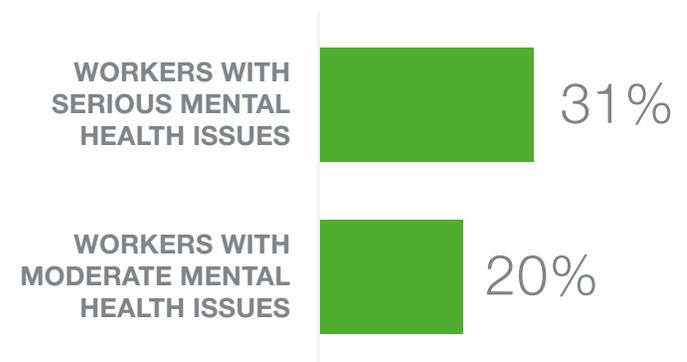
Mental health issues are defined as having serious mental illness and/or moderate mental distress.

What Are Employees Struggling With?

People struggle with a range of substances, from legal substances to illegal and prescription drugs. However, the majority of substance abuse and addiction issues are related to alcohol.

More than half of workers who reported substance abuse issues said alcohol is a part of their struggle.

Category	Percentage
ALCOHOL	57%
DRUGS (GENERAL)	6%
OPIOIDS	6%
PAIN MEDICATION (GENERAL)	5%
MARIJUANA	5%
PRESCRIPTION DRUGS	4%
METHAMPHETAMINE	3%
CAFFEINE	3%
COCAINE	3%
NICOTINE	2%

Effects on the Workplace

Substance abuse and addiction can greatly disrupt a person's time, energy, and attention.

These disruptions are also affecting people at their jobs, impacting job performance and productivity. And coworkers are aware of colleagues' substance abuse challenges and how they affect someone's ability to work — from lowered productivity to being fired.
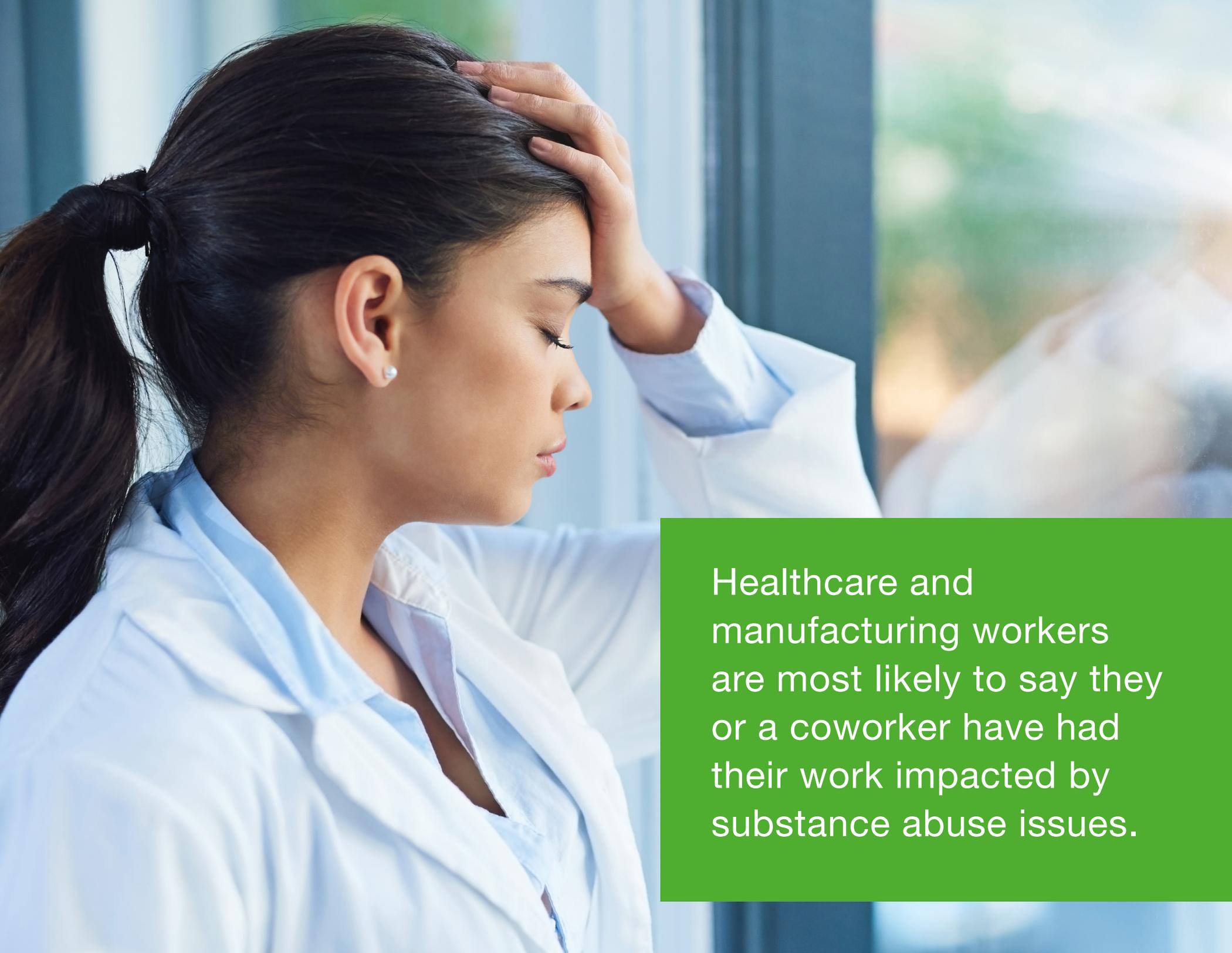
45% Have been or have known someone who was **less productive** due to substance abuse

44% Have or have known someone who has **missed a day of work** due to substance abuse

33% Have been or have known someone who **was fired from a job** due to substance abuse

Healthcare and manufacturing workers are most likely to say they or a coworker have had their work impacted by substance abuse issues.

Substance Abuse by Industry

Looking at the data by industry, we start to see workers in certain industries are more likely to be experiencing struggles with substance abuse.

MISSED A DAY OF WORK		WAS FIRED
50%	⚙️	38%
48%	🛡️	42%
45%	⚖️	35%
40%	✏️	27%
40%	🔗	28%
38%	💲	27%

INDUSTRY

Education ●   Finance ●   Government ●
Healthcare ●   Manufacturing ●   Technology ●

Substance Abuse by Age

No generation is immune — respondents from each generation have or know a coworker who has struggled with some level of substance abuse and addiction, from alcohol to illegal drugs.
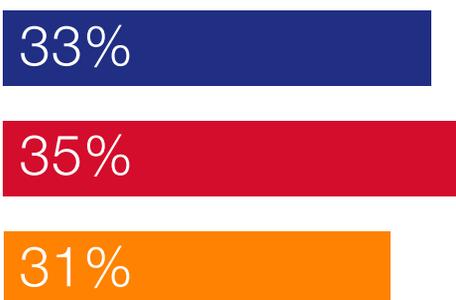
But when we look across all workers, we see that Gen X workers report the highest numbers.

MISSED A DAY OF WORK

42%

48%

43%

WAS FIRED

33%

35%

31%

GENERATION   Millennial ■   Gen X ■   Boomer ■

Seeking Help for Substance Abuse

One key to battling addiction and substance abuse is seeking help. It's a crucial step on the path toward recovery.

But when it comes to seeking help from employers, there is a lot of hesitancy.

The type of industry someone is in can also influence their comfort level with sharing their struggles with their employer. For example, **workers in education are least comfortable seeking help from their employers for substance abuse issues.**
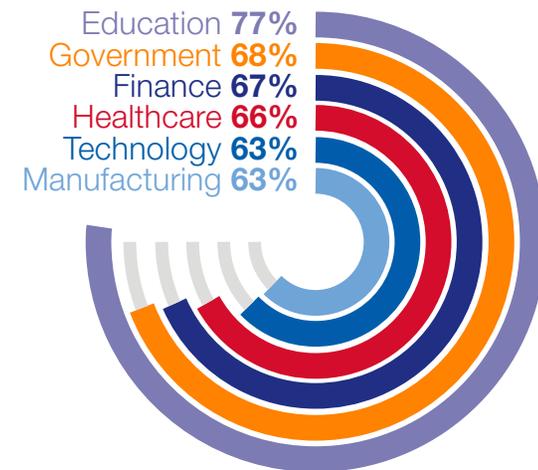
68% of workers say they would **NOT be comfortable seeking help from their employer**

59% of workers say they would **NOT be comfortable accepting employer help if it was offered**

WORKERS, BY INDUSTRY, WHO SAY THEY ARE **NOT** COMFORTABLE SEEKING HELP FROM THEIR EMPLOYER

Education **77%**
Government **68%**
Finance **67%**
Healthcare **66%**
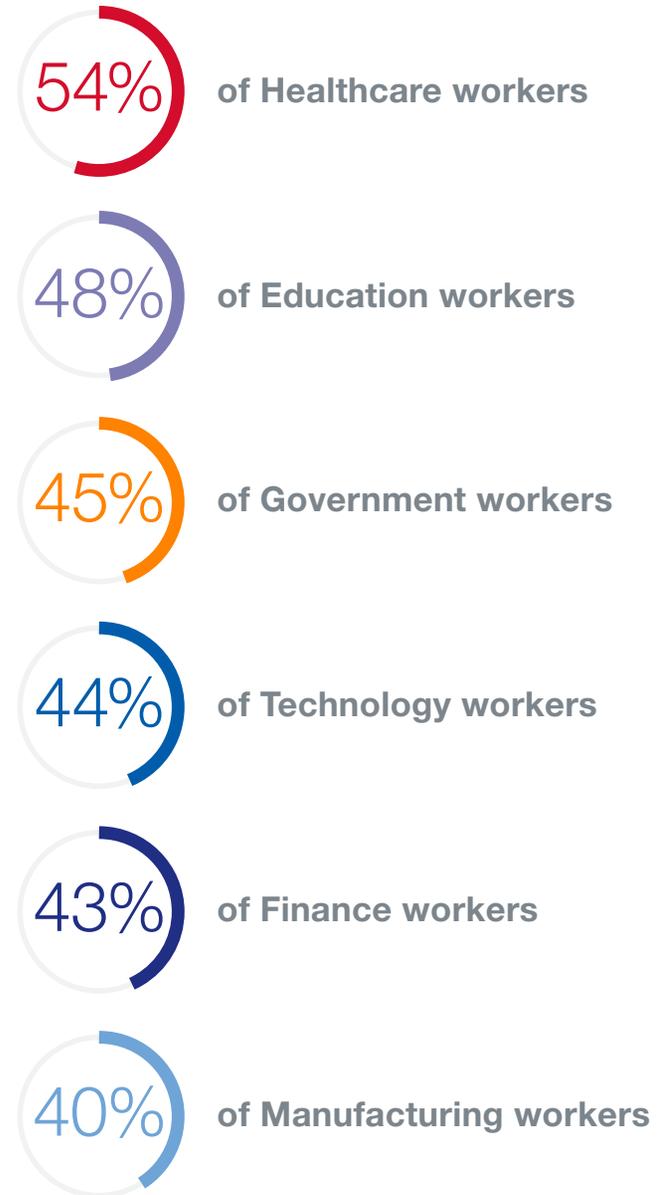Technology **63%**
Manufacturing **63%**

Employee Concerns

Workers are concerned there may be consequences if they let their employer know they are struggling with substance abuse issues.

Healthcare workers are especially concerned about getting fired if their employer became aware of a substance abuse issue.

54% of Healthcare workers

48% of Education workers

45% of Government workers

44% of Technology workers

43% of Finance workers
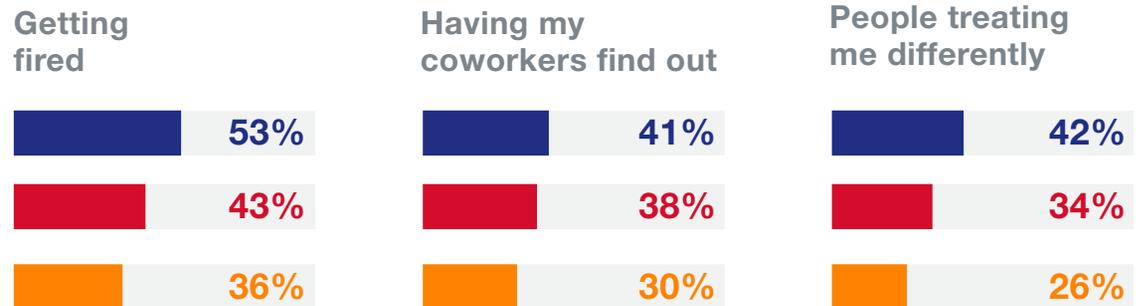
40% of Manufacturing workers

Employee Concerns, continued

Younger workers are worried the stigmas associated with substance abuse and addiction could ultimately impact their long-term job security and experience.

BIGGEST WORRIES OF INFORMING THEIR EMPLOYER OF A
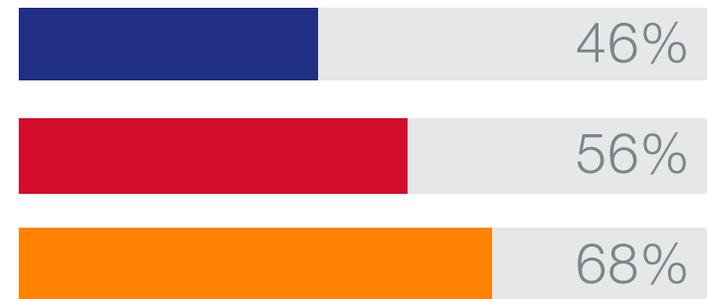**SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUE**, BY GENERATION

Getting fired

53%
43%
36%

Having my coworkers find out

41%
38%
30%

People treating me differently

42%
34%
26%

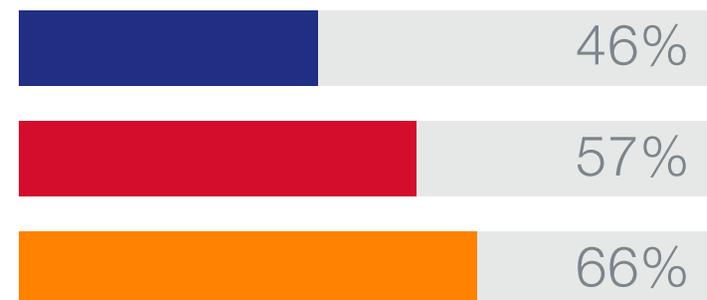GENERATION   Millennial ■   Gen X ■   Boomer ■

Seeking Help

Even when resources are available, many employees — especially younger workers — aren't aware of what is available to them for help.

GETTING HELP FOR **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

KNOW WHAT WORK RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE

46%

56%

68%

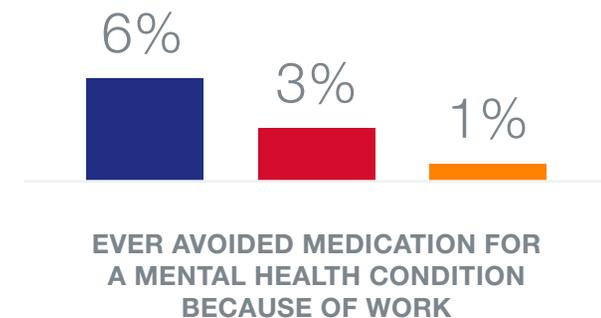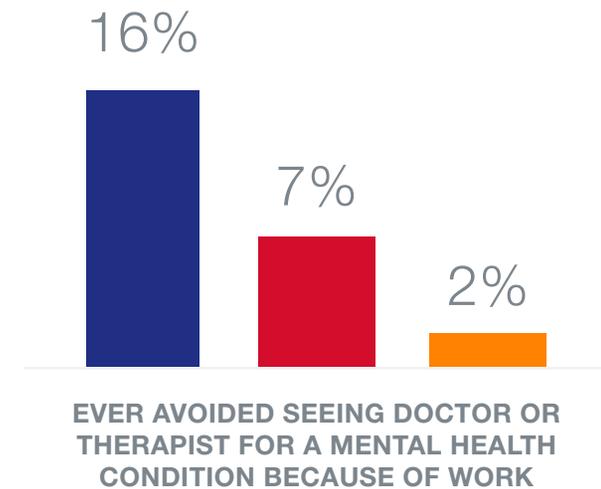**KNOW WHO TO TALK TO AT WORK FOR HELP**

46%

57%

66%

GENERATION   Millennial ■   Gen X ■   Boomer ■

Seeking Help, continued

Even if workers want help for their substance abuse issues, work-related stigmas and concerns can create a roadblock.

Younger workers are also most likely to avoid seeing a doctor or therapist or avoid taking medication for a mental health condition due to work concerns.
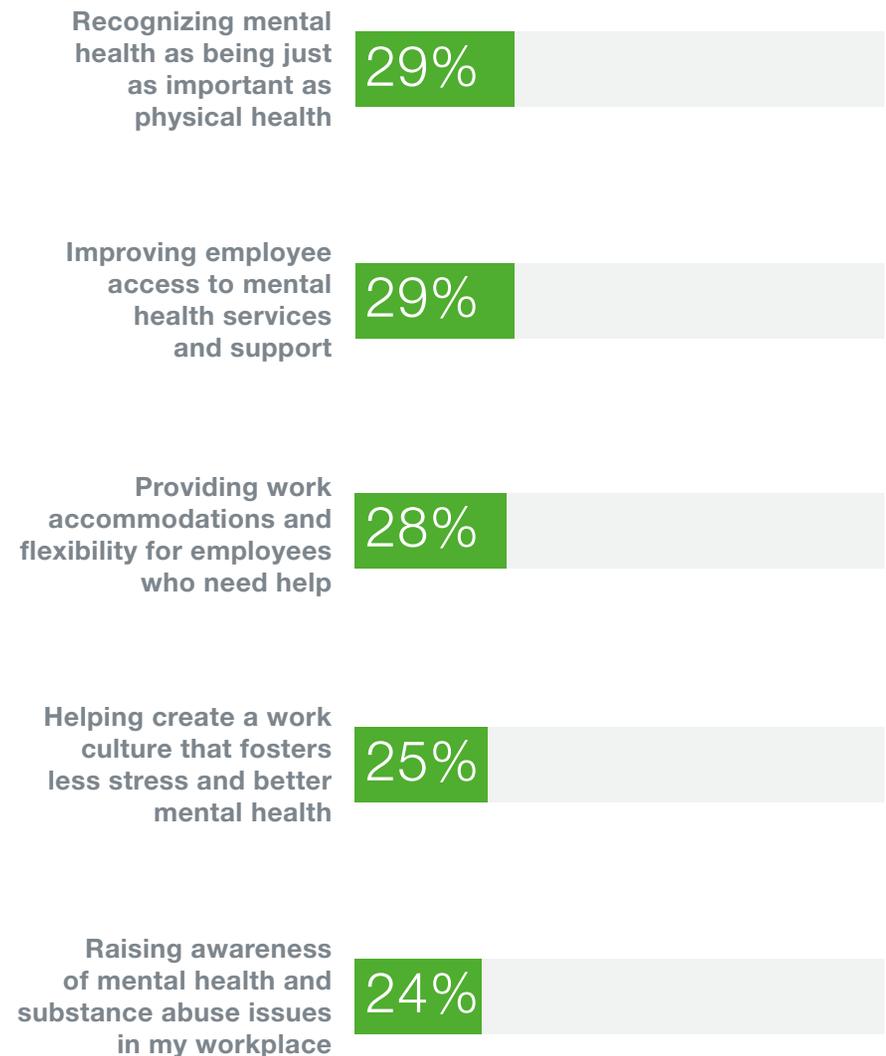
16%
7%
2%

EVER AVOIDED SEEING DOCTOR OR THERAPIST FOR A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION BECAUSE OF WORK

6%
3%
1%

EVER AVOIDED MEDICATION FOR A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION BECAUSE OF WORK

GENERATION   Millennial ■   Gen X ■   Boomer ■

How Are Employers Doing?

When it comes to how employers are supporting those with behavioral health issues, there's a lot of opportunity.

Fewer than a third of workers give high marks to employers for doing enough to create a work environment where employees are comfortable seeking help or providing them with appropriate resources to assist with achieving positive outcomes.

PERCENT OF EMPLOYEES
RATING THEIR EMPLOYERS AS
"VERY GOOD" OR "EXCELLENT" AT…

Recognizing mental health as being just as important as physical health
29%

Improving employee access to mental health services and support
29%

Providing work accommodations and flexibility for employees who need help
28%

Helping create a work culture that fosters less stress and better mental health
25%

Raising awareness of mental health and substance abuse issues in my workplace
24%

Creating a Supportive Culture

It's clear substance abuse issues are taking a toll on workers — and the organizations they work for. When we look closer, we see a few trends we can respond to:

▶ More Gen X workers have or know someone who have substance abuse issues that are impacting their work

▶ Workers who interact with sensitive populations, such as in education and healthcare, are most worried about losing their jobs if employers found out

▶ Less than a third of workers think their employers are doing a very good or excellent job at creating an environment that fosters behavioral health

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Find additional resources related to behavioral health in the workplace by visiting the behavioral health resource center at standard.com/behavioralhealth. You'll find more reports developed from our Behavioral Health Impact Study and other helpful tools.

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO CREATE A WORKPLACE CULTURE THAT **SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES WITH ADDICTION AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES?**

○ **Include employee health in your company mission and values, and ensure that leadership and policies reflect these values**

○ **Offer comprehensive employee benefit options to treat substance abuse issues, such as substance abuse counseling and medication-assisted addiction treatments**

○ **Provide wellness programs and incentives to encourage employee participation**

○ **Educate employees about where to access benefits information and resources, and who to contact for help**

○ **Partner with experts, like your disability carrier, who understand effective behavioral health accommodations and solutions**

○ **Ensure remote workers and teams are supported and included in positive work culture programs**

○ **Offer flexibility to employees during disruptive times, and to those experiencing substance abuse challenges**

Research methodology

The Standard commissioned Versta Research, an independent research firm, to design and execute a survey of 2,004 full-time employees in the U.S. about mental and behavioral health issues in the workplace. All respondents were aware of employer sponsored disability benefits, whether or not their employer offered those benefits and whether or not they participated. All industries and economic sectors except federal government employees were included. The survey was fielded in September and October, 2019.

In addition to the survey, selected respondents were invited to participate in follow-up phone interviews to gain deeper insight related to worker perspectives on how effectively employers are dealing with behavioral health issues, and the critical workplace needs of employees with behavioral health issues. The follow-up interviews were conducted in January and February, 2020.

In the survey, mental health was measured using the Kessler K6 scale with cut off criteria recommended by Judith J. Prochaska, Hai-Yen Sung, Wendy Max, Yanling Shi, and Michael Ong in "Validity Study of the K6 Scale as a Measure of Moderate Mental Distress based on Mental Health Treatment Need and Utilization" published in *The International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, June 2012, Volume 21(2): 88–97.

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