



SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS
AND PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE

STORYBOOK

WHY PEOPLE IN RECOVERY NEED PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

According to the National Partnership for Women and Families:

- Drug use and dependence have been a widespread problem in the United States for decades, and low-income communities and communities of color suffer the most.
- The dramatic rise of opioid use and dependence in the last 10 years has had devastating consequences – dependence disproportionately affects young, low-income adults in rural communities.
- Many people with substance use disorders are employed and need time away from their jobs for effective treatment – more than 70% of employers say they have been affected by prescription drug use among their employees
- Paid family and medical leave would benefit family caregivers and people seeking treatment for substance use disorders, yet only 14% of people in the U.S. workforce have access to paid leave
- Paid leave would allow people to take time away from work to seek or help loved ones receive treatment – family members can play a key role in the care and recovery of people with substance use disorders by helping loved ones with health care arrangements, treatment, and financial assistance.
- Without paid leave, caregivers can lose income or their jobs altogether, creating a financial burden

A national paid family and medical leave program would help all workers and family caregivers take paid leave to address serious family and medical needs, including serious health issues related to cost-saving, life-saving treatment for drug use. A responsibly funded, shared-cost system would mean that employers would not bear the full cost of leave and workers would be covered no matter where they live, their employers or their jobs.

Source:

Treatment for Drug Use and the Need for Paid Family and Medical Leave, National Partnership for Women and Families, July 2017.

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ADAM AQUIZAP

THE PROCESS RECOVERY CENTER HUDSON, NH

Adam Aquizap is a behavioral health technician and house manager at The Process Recovery Center, a drug and alcohol addiction treatment center located in Hudson, NH. They offer a partial hospitalization program and an intensive outpatient program, as well as sober living and aftercare.

The Process Recovery Center provides up to 185 beds for sober living, but could help 50 to 100 more people per year if their patients had paid family and medical leave. Unfortunately, most people that come to their center do not.

Lack of access to paid medical leave is the second-highest reason that people do not get the care they need to break the cycle of their addiction. Those who are suffering from addiction and cannot afford time off from work have it much harder. Most people who have this disease will need at least 30 to 90 consecutive days of intensive treatment. This amount of time is financially unobtainable for most American families who lack paid leave.

Recently, Adam met with a gentleman who had developed a severe substance abuse disorder, and was insured through his employer. However, he could never complete a full treatment program because if he worked too few hours, he would lose his health insurance and therefore his ability to pay for treatment at all. But he kept working at his treatment as much as he could, interrupted by the necessity of maintaining his employment. But prioritizing his health and his recovery meant that ultimately, he lost his job. He couldn't work enough hours to maintain his insurance, and eventually his employer let him go due to his limited schedule. Now he's on Medicaid, which isn't ideal, because it costs the center far more to treat him than it did before – more than twice as much, because Medicaid reimbursement levels are so low.

If he was covered by a national paid medical leave program, this could have been avoided. This story is one of many individuals who want to seek treatment, but lack of access to paid leave is a barrier.

DIANA MITCHELL HAMPTON, VA



Four years ago, Diana's seventeen-year-old daughter became addicted to heroin. A year and a half later, she succumbed to her addiction. When Diana first became aware of her daughter's illness, she was able to enroll her in a rehab program in Florida.

Diana took one month off from work, unpaid, during this period to help her daughter find the help she needed. Diana had to pay her insurance costs back to her employer which amounted to \$1000 during a time she wasn't collecting a paycheck. When her daughter returned from Florida, Diana was unable to take additional leave from work to help her daughter adjust to life post-rehab. In addition, Diana was struggling with her own trauma stemming from being the primary caretaker of her daughter.

After having gone through this experience and learning first-hand how difficult it is for families to receive the support they need, Diana dreams of starting an organization called Brooke's Bridge to help families access difficult-to-acquire resources needed to help a loved one through addiction.

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Brooke was beautiful and intelligent, she just made a mistake. Paid leave is not a democrat or republican issue - it's an everybody issue. Politicians receive the best benefits available and yet they deny us those same benefits?! It's not right.

- Diana

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EDMUND VANCE SOUTHERN WV

In 2017, Edmund Vance, a coal miner in Southern WV, had to give up his job to seek treatment for Substance Use Disorder. After treatment, because

he didn't have paid leave, he had to take a new job at a landscaping company for half the pay. He went from making \$28 an hour in the coal mines to \$12 an hour at the landscaping company.

If he had had paid leave, he would have had his job waiting for him when he got out of treatment. Not having paid leave he had to start completely over. He has two kids, so taking that huge paycut was very tough on the family. His wife says, "We struggled to make sure bills didn't get cut off, there were times when we had to take the kids to the doctor and didn't have the money to fill their prescriptions until payday."

His kids had to stay with his mom while he was in treatment. It's only because he had the support of his parents that he was able to go through this. Since he didn't have paid leave, if he hadn't also had his parents helping him he might not even have been able to start his recovery journey.

KERRY NORTON
HOPE ON HAVEN HILL
ROCHESTER, NH



When Kerry's son suffered an overdose from heroin, they knew he needed to get out patient treatment and start his recovery. Fortunately, he worked for an employer who offered him paid leave and he was able to take the time off that he needed for his recovery.

After finishing treatment, he returned to work and within two months he was offered a raise and promotion. During his recovery, Kerry exhausted all of her own paid vacation days and took unpaid time off in order to care for her grandson.

Kerry is the Program Director and co-founder of Hope on Haven Hill, a nonprofit residential treatment facility for pregnant women with substance use disorder, their children under five years of age and their newborns, located in Rochester, New Hampshire.

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My family was nearly destroyed by substance use disorder. Both personally and professionally, I have seen the effects of having - or not having - paid family and medical leave and the influence this one policy has on treatment success.

- Kerry

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KHRISTA MESSINGER CHARLESTON, WV

Khrista Messinger was working for the City of Charleston police department as a humane officer (dealing with animal neglect and abuse, or crime scenes involving animals). She had been battling substance use disorders for her whole adult life.

Khrista went to the HR department and told them that she needed to go to detox and rehab. They didn't have a formal paid medical leave program but they let her use all of the sick leave and vacation time that she had saved up.

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You can't just go detox for a week and go back to work. You need to be out for a full month before you can get a clean blood test or urine test to return to work.

It meant the world to me to have that time. It allowed me to get in touch with counselors and psychiatrists and to detox in the hospital. I couldn't have done it without having paid leave from work. It allowed me to keep my job.

If I hadn't had paid leave, I never would have gone into treatment. I needed to pay my bills. I didn't want to be homeless. You still have to pay your bills when you're in rehab. In order to get clean, I needed the security of paid leave to be able to move forward.

I have friends who won't go to treatment because they can't afford to not pay their rent or not feed their children. In order to get clean, you have to be able to surrender your life. And a lot of people don't have paid leave so they don't have that opportunity.

I was lucky to have saved my vacation and sick time. Most people don't have the luxury of saving up their time because other things come up, they have their families or illnesses.

If the government gives paid leave, it's going to open more opportunities for people to get sober and to have a better quality of life to help people improve their lives while still putting food on the table.

- Khrista

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JOHN LUDICE
ADDICTION RECOVERY SERVICES,
STRATHAM, NH



John is the Program Director at Addiction Recovery Services, an outpatient treatment program with offices in Salem and Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He feels that a significant barrier in the fight to end substance use in New Hampshire is that working people cannot give up their wages in order to leave work and get the treatment they need. He believes that access to paid family and medical leave would help lighten the financial obstacles standing in the way between workers and treatment services.

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There's a perception that people with addiction aren't working, but I work at a treatment center and we get dozens of calls each week from working people who need treatment. One of the most common obstacles keeping people from the treatment they need is that they can't afford to take time away from work to tackle their substance use.

- John

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RISE BARBERSHOP NASHUA, NH

Rise Barber Shop is a recovery-friendly workplace founded by individuals who themselves are in recovery for substance use disorder.

They employ workers who are in recovery, and help others to follow suit and seek an addiction-free life by offering free haircuts through a voucher system and offering a safe, drug-free place in Nashua for people to be.

They have begun coordinating with some area treatment centers where, if they have a client in early recovery, they can send a voucher along with the client for a free cut. If someone has a job interview, they will give them a free haircut, and service a lot of folks who use the services offered by the local homeless shelter.

Rise Barbershop supports paid leave because of their experience with Substance Use Disorder recovery. They know from both the experiences of their staff and the community they serve that it can take 28 to 90 days of full-time in-patient rehab just to start on the journey of recovery, and that it would be impossible to hold down a job during that time. Furthermore, they know that as a business, paid leave helps them to retain their staff in the face of unexpected shutdowns, and to guarantee that their staff, all of whom have personal experience with recovering from SUD, can take time off for their own medical needs.