



Initiative for Work and Well-Being at the BC Centre on Substance Use: Improving Occupational and Health Trajectories for People with Lived and Living Experience of Substance Use

Background: Longstanding research clearly demonstrates that work is intrinsically linked to health and well-being. A growing body of studies has further demonstrated how the dynamics and health impacts of employment, unemployment and other forms of income generation specifically play out for people with lived and living experience of substance use. Importantly, considerations related to criminalization, surveillance, stigma and discrimination, worker safety, impairment, and poverty require specific and nuanced attention in order to optimize the individual and public health benefits of work for a group of people commonly relegated to the margins of the labour market.

Rationale: While research in this area is growing, there remain significant gaps in our understanding of the relationship between work and substance use and evidence-based action to support workers and employers. This is particularly the case in areas that could support individual occupational and health trajectories; employers' capacity to create opportunities and workplace substance use policy that promote workforce retention; and policy makers' production of policy environments that facilitate labour market participation, mitigate drug-related harm and reduce poverty. Further, sector-specific considerations are important. Workers in trades, construction and resource industries; those in the service industry; clinicians, including nurses; gig workers, and those working at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum commonly contend with disproportionate and occupation-specific substance-use-related and substance use policy-related harm. Growth in these areas would significantly benefit from research that is specifically designed to be policy-relevant, action oriented, well-being focused and supported by multi-sectoral knowledge mobilization efforts.

Objective: We are establishing an Initiative for Work and Well-Being at the BC Centre on Substance Use that will specifically focus on developing an evidence base that supports workers, unions, employers, clinicians and policy makers to take action that **reduces substance use-related harm for workers, supports employers and improves occupational outcomes**. Focusing specifically on British Columbia and pairing scientific and knowledge mobilization platforms, the Initiative for Work and Well-Being will fill important gaps in knowledge and support evidence-based change.

Proposed areas of focus: Following an assessment of the current research literature and exploratory conversations with key actors in this area, including workers, employers, clinicians, union representatives, we propose initial action in the following areas:

- Primary research on the **trades, construction and resource extraction sectors** that is focused on worker safety and well-being, access to treatment and job retention; evidence-informed substance use policy; effective clinical support; and workforce sustainability.
- Other, sector-specific research on **effective work models and adaptations** to support the labour market trajectories of people with lived and living experience of substance use.
- **Clinically informed guidance** for employers, unions, and other groups in the areas of impairment screening, monitoring, safety sensitivity, and substance use disorder treatment.
- Evidence to support **social and labour policy** that addresses unemployment traps, expands return to work pathways, expands health-promoting social supports, and provides clear and nuanced guidance on safety sensitivity and substance use at work.
- The development of a **Community of Practice** with provincial, national and international reach to pool multi-sectoral expertise, identify and disseminate best practice, center lived and living experience and expertise, and coordinate knowledge mobilization and reform efforts.

Anticipated impact and request: We anticipate this program of research and knowledge mobilization will have direct, material and significant impacts on the work and well-being trajectories of people with living experience of drug use. We are currently seeking collaborators and funding partners to support the launch of this urgent and important initiative to support worker well-being.