

Review into work support for drug addicts



Professor Dame Carol Black has undertaken a review into the barriers to employment for people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol, and made some recommendations for change. Here, we take a look at some of those recommendations.

Relevant Statistics

The review indicates that:

- Alcohol harm costs society £21 billion a year, with the costs to the National Health Service (NHS) estimated at £3.5 billion.
- In England, just over 150,000 adults (out of the 250,000 to 300,000 with a severe dependence) were in specialist alcohol treatment in 2014/15. Of those leaving treatment last year, 57 per cent had completed the treatment successfully.
- In England just over 200,000 adults were in specialist drug treatment in 2014/15.

The aim of the review was to offer, as far as possible, an evidence-based analysis of the factors that stand in the way of employment rather than to offer utopian solutions to deeply complex problems. It recommends practical interventions, including changes in services, practices, behaviour and attitudes.

The Role of Employers

The review suggests that, for many people, alcohol and drug problems start whilst they are still in work. It is therefore vital that employers encourage those who are still in work to reduce hazardous drinking and avoid drug use entirely. Some employers already offer best practice support and the review welcomed the Government's efforts in trying to expand this.

Generally, although employers are willing to consider supporting existing staff who develop addictions, they are much less willing to recruit people with an existing history of dependence. Employers expressed a number of fears, including the reliability of potential candidates with addiction problems, the cost of offering support, the impact on other staff, and the reputation of the business.

The review found that employers had invested heavily in recruiting and supporting people with previous addiction problems but this was the exception rather than the norm.

Recommendations

Some recommendations were focussed around the workplace itself:

- Government, working with employers, should develop guidance on best practice in recruiting drug and alcohol dependent people. It is also recommended that campaigns are used to promote this guidance and to address the problem of stigma more generally;
- Government should ensure that the employment advisors as part of an Individual Placement and Support trial have access to a small discretionary fund to cover legitimate additional costs that smaller employers incur when recruiting people with a history of alcohol or drug dependency;
- Government should extend the assessment and support services within Access to Work to include all drug and alcohol dependent people who are on a treatment.

The content of this briefing is correct at the time of publishing.

Summary

- Alcohol and drug dependence are specifically excluded from the scope of the Equality Act 2010 meaning they are not classed as disabilities;
- However, sometimes physical and mental conditions which are a result of such dependencies can amount to a disability.

Please contact the 24 Hour Advice Service for advice on your specific situation before acting on the information in this publication.