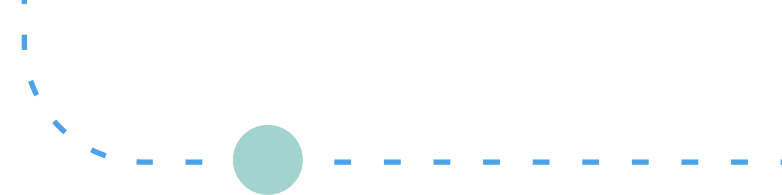




ADDICTION, MENTAL HEALTH AND  
THE HIGH COST OF HEALTHCARE:

# What's Missing From Your Behavioral Health Strategy?





**T**he COVID-19 pandemic sent employers spiraling into crisis mode, on high alert for how the new world of remote work would affect employees, customers and profits. But in pursuit of maintaining business as usual, many companies have missed critical red flags in healthcare data that reveal an important workplace crisis: the pandemic's negative effect on employee mental health and subsequent increase in substance use disorders.

Facing isolation, stress and uncertainty, many individuals in the workforce are at increased risk of elevated adverse mental health symptoms such as anxiety and depression,<sup>1</sup> which, in turn, can create a real risk for individuals with a substance use disorder as well as those at risk of developing one.<sup>2</sup> In today's workforce, these statistics represent millions of individuals over the age of 18, the majority of them hard at work in our new economy.



**Job insecurity**



**Fear of infection at work**



**Financial challenges**



**Heightened awareness of risk**



**Adjusting to remote work  
or work site isolation**



**New family and social demands**

In fact, since the pandemic began in the United States, studies report a rise in ...



**Overall alcohol sales (+25%<sup>3</sup> between March and May 2020) and online alcohol sales (+243%).**



**Drug overdoses, both documented (+13%) and suspected (+18%).<sup>4</sup> Over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the year ending in May 2020, the highest number ever recorded in a 12-month period.<sup>5</sup>**



**Methamphetamine (+23%), cocaine (+19%) and fentanyl (+67%)<sup>6</sup> in urine samples in various healthcare and clinical settings throughout the nation.**

These behaviors directly affect the workplace, with employers seeing an increase in healthcare costs associated with mental health and substance use disorders<sup>7</sup> as well as workplace challenges such as employee safety,<sup>8</sup> lower levels of productivity and increased absenteeism.<sup>10</sup>

"Addiction and mental health go together as the rule more than the exception. In fact, they tend to occur together more than they do apart," said Dr. Suzette Glasner, vice president of clinical affairs at Quit Genius and an Associate Professor at UCLA. "Compared with the general population, people who struggle with addictions are roughly twice as likely to suffer from mood or anxiety disorders.<sup>11</sup> Considering that the last poll by the National Institute of Mental Health showed 51.5 million adults with some form of mental illness,<sup>12</sup> that means about 8 million adults, or 18% of the adult population in the U.S., have both a substance use disorder and another mental illness."

As organizations invest in behavioral health strategies to empower employees and make progress toward critical business goals, it's time to draw attention to the need for support for addiction, substance use disorder and mental health.

**Here are three strategy foundations along with results employers can expect.**

## CORNERSTONE NO. 1

# Understand the real science behind addiction




Past generations had the wrong idea about substance use disorders and addiction.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that the American Medical Association classified alcoholism as a disease in 1956 and an addiction in 1987,<sup>14</sup> even as much as a decade ago, these chronic illnesses were often considered personal or moral failings. As such, they were often judged, ignored or even used as a cause for dismissal. Today, science and medical research have revealed that, far from being a character flaw or moral failing, substance use disorders represent a documented chronic illness, much like heart disease or cancer.

*"As mental health has become a national priority, the stigma around it has lifted significantly. People are openly talking about how isolated, depressed and anxious they feel at this particular time in the world, creating a good conversation starter employers can use to understand and support their employees."*

Suzette Glasner, Ph.D., Vice President of Clinical Affairs at Quit Genius,  
Associate Professor at UCLA





“New research shows that genetic and environmental factors predispose a person to addiction and substance use disorders,” said Dr. Yusuf Sherwani, CEO at Quit Genius. “But sometimes employers still see this as an employee’s avoidable personal problem. In reality, a lot of factors conspire to get and keep someone addicted, including the social isolation due to COVID-19 and employment insecurity. When we can take the stigma out of getting support and help for addiction, we clear a pathway to give people access to the holistic and appropriate treatment they need so they can be resilient in the face of today’s unprecedented stressors.”

Destigmatized, it’s possible to see the symptoms of addiction and substance use disorders in the same light as other chronic illnesses – symptoms that can be supported, treated and managed to reduce relapse rates and allow some individuals to be in remission for life through the support of therapies such as medication-assisted treatment (MAT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and psychological support.

Click [here](#) to learn more about how Quit Genius combines MAT, CBT and 1:1 support to create an effective addiction and substance use disorder solution.

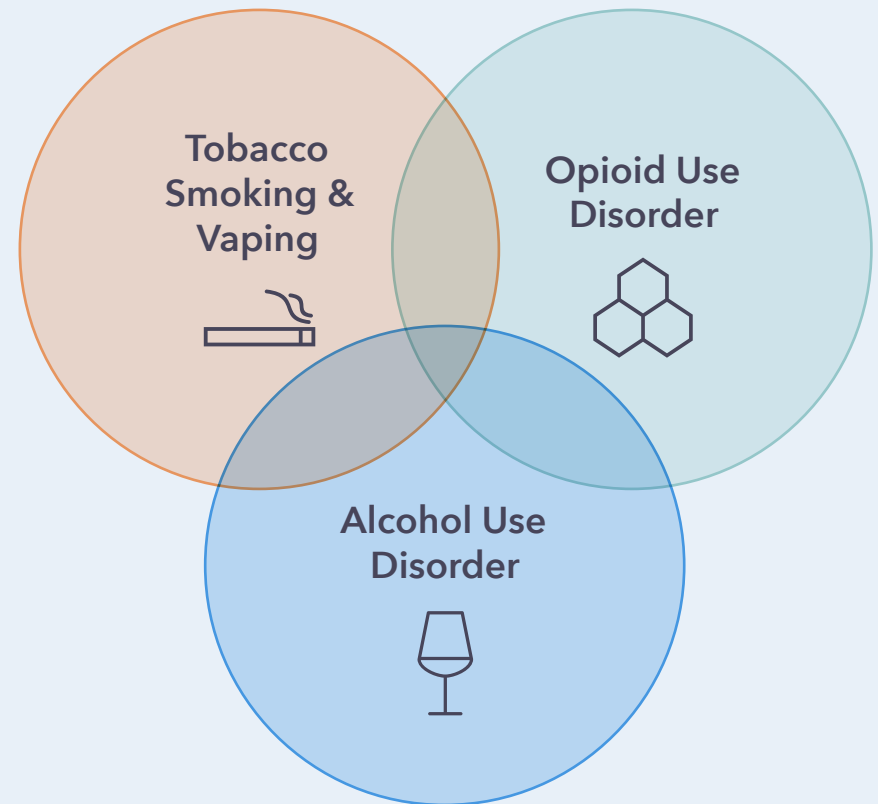


## CORNERSTONE NO. 2

# Open your eyes to substance use disorders hidden behind mental health costs

Employers are often surprised to discover just how much of their healthcare costs can be attributed to substance use disorders and addiction, adding up to more than \$400 billion each year.<sup>15</sup> But the costs are even greater when you take into account the fact that people who struggle with addictions are roughly twice as likely to suffer from mood or anxiety disorders,<sup>16</sup> leaving about 18% of the adult population in the U.S. facing a substance use disorder along with another mental illness.<sup>17</sup> With the cost of employee mental health rising twice as fast as other medical expenses,<sup>18</sup> it all adds up for employers.

*The national cost of employees with addictions exceeds \$400 billion annually.<sup>19</sup>*



Addiction to multiple substances continues to be one of the most significant drivers of medical spend among employers. Tobacco and smoking, alcohol use, and opioid use commonly overlap and cause multiple health implications.<sup>20</sup>

Just consider that there's a 70% chance that a person with an alcohol-use disorder also smokes and an 18% chance that a person who smokes also has an opioid disorder;<sup>21</sup> and all the while, individuals with addictions are twice as likely as their peers to suffer from depression and anxiety, and four times as likely when the addiction is to opioids.

*"Because of these circumstances introduced by the pandemic, there's an emerging and mutual receptivity among employers and employees to discussions around mental health, creating a real opportunity not only to make mental health and addiction treatment resources available, but also to promote greater adoption among people who need it but are not comfortable asking for it."*

Suzette Glasner, Ph.D., Vice President of Clinical Affairs at Quit Genius, Associate Professor at UCLA

Thanks to national statistics, we know that most employers will experience a significant percentage of employees struggling with substance use disorders. But organizations can also capture specific data around their unique employee population by evaluating healthcare claims codes to understand how employees are using your healthcare services – and reveal surprising insights.

"Organizations don't always see the cost associated with addiction," Sherwani said. "But when you break down the claims codes and understand how physical health, behavioral health and pharmacy spend can be related to substance use disorder without being directly connected, you can very clearly demonstrate the financial implications and how much the management of addiction and mental health can lower operating costs."

Sherwani points out that organizations that carefully analyze codes related to illness such as COPD, cancer, hypertension and more often implicate addiction-related healthcare costs as one of the top five categories of spend. For example, one Quit Genius client saw a 111% increase in claims related to alcohol and opioid use in a single year – and was able to act quickly to try to support it.



## CORNERSTONE NO. 3

# Understand employees' critical need for convenience

Spurred by many factors, including the COVID-19-inspired rise of telehealth, the way we use healthcare as a society is changing.<sup>22</sup> Virtual treatment and healthcare on demand are slowly becoming the new normal, and consumers have placed a new premium on convenience: The idea of driving across town and sitting in a waiting room for a 20-minute healthcare visit doesn't quite make sense anymore. The most effective support for addiction and substance use disorders takes these needs into account to make it as convenient as possible to receive ongoing treatment.

"Using an EAP is not the same as getting 1:1 attention from an addiction specialist, but the old way of accessing healthcare made that financially restrictive for many people," Sherwani said. "The combination of effective de-stigmatization and convenient, private and accessible treatment allows employers to reach people at that golden moment of recognition when the support will be most effective. They can be speaking with a physician, nurse or coach within 24 hours on their own time."

The convenience factor is also important when it comes to reaching employees with preventive support. As employees' resilience is tested day after day, a support program offered through an employer can provide a convenient way to check in and assess an employee's state of mind before they get stuck in a cycle of dependence.

"Convenience is critical because it takes into account the earlier phases of a substance use disorder in which a person starts misusing a substance but it wouldn't technically qualify as a diagnosis," Glasner said. "At this stage, they might not have addiction, but they are at risk of developing it because of these behaviors and the unmitigated stress they're experiencing. Circulating information, putting programs in place that screen for any risk of these behaviors in a voluntary and confidential way, and making it clear that the solution is private, convenient and can be implemented on your own terms can help employers catch substance use disorders before employees are experiencing serious problems."



# Make the connection

*"An employer's role in supporting substance use disorders will not end with the resolution of COVID-19. While the pandemic was a perfect storm for many issues we see today, there is no vaccine for mental health or addiction. As we move into a new world of work where people work more flexibly and access healthcare using technology, employers must look ahead to see how they can help employees navigate those challenges indefinitely."*

Dr. Yusuf Sherwani, CEO of Quit Genius

Mental health and addiction are personal issues. But they're also personnel issues. Employers are perfectly positioned to assist employees with these behaviors, inspiring long-term benefits to both the individual and the organization in the form of reduced medical healthcare costs, improved employee engagement and productivity, and long-term employee lifetime value and loyalty.



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# Quit Genius

[Quit Genius](#) is the world's first digital clinic for treating tobacco, alcohol and opioid addictions. Built on the evidence-based principle of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), Quit Genius combines virtual behavioral therapy with approved medication and connected devices to help employers tackle the high cost of addiction in the workplace while improving the lives of their employees. To-date, Quit Genius has helped more than 60,000 people quit their addictions. The company integrates with health plans, pharmacy benefit managers and wellness platforms to deliver a turnkey implementation experience. Visit [www.quitgenius.com](http://www.quitgenius.com) for more information.

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