



MASS. C.A.R.E.S.

**Press Release:            EMBARGOED UNTIL January 14<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 AM.**

**Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation Launches its Mass. C.A.R.E.S. Employer Initiative to Address the Opioid Epidemic**

BOSTON, January 14, 2020 – Today the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) launched a year-long initiative to engage employers in the solution to the opioid epidemic. The Massachusetts Communication and Awareness around Recovery and Employer Support program (Mass C.A.R.E.S.) was created in response to a report issued from the MTF last year that highlighted significant economic and fiscal impact the opioid crisis has had on the Commonwealth. The report, *The Opioid Epidemic: An issue of Substance*, made it clear that employers play a critical role in a solution to this crisis.

Mass. C.A.R.E.S, made up of a number of concerned employers and other stakeholders, including John Hancock, KPMG, Liberty Mutual, PwC, Bank of America, Rockland Trust, EY and more, was created to enable and challenge employers to increase awareness of the signs and consequences of opioid use disorder in the workplace and offer tangible ways to address it. By acting collectively, MTF is hoping to move the needle on this critical societal and workforce issue.

Participating employers will agree to take four actions over the course of 2020 to make their workplaces more recovery-friendly as a way to address opioid use disorder (OUD) in the workplace. Mass. C.A.R.E.S. provides suggested action steps in the areas of risk assessment, benefit analysis and revision, worksite improvements, community-based solutions and reducing stigma but encourages employers to be innovative and bold in the actions they choose to take.

Participating employers will also:

- ✓ Challenge other employers to get involved through promotion of the initiative
- ✓ Agree to share action steps and their impact with MTF for aggregate inclusion in a report
- ✓ Attend quarterly discussions with like-minded employers to share best practice, successes and challenges
- ✓ Apply for designation as a recovery-friendly workplace

By engaging with Mass. C.A.R.E.S. employers will also experience benefits:

- ✓ Retaining a **healthier, more productive and motivated workforce**
- ✓ **Saving lives** by promoting awareness and reducing the stigma of substance use disorders, treatment and recovery services
- ✓ **Improving the lives** of your employees, customers, business partners, friends, and family while strengthening our communities and improving our economic future.

“Mass. C.A.R.E.S. is a natural outgrowth of the groundbreaking and eye-opening report that MTF issued 14 months ago” said **MTF President Eileen McAnney**. “In addition to the human and societal reasons for engaging in this effort, there is also an economic imperative for doing so.”

“I agree with MTF that mobilizing the community to battle the opioid crisis and destigmatize substance use disorders is critical for people to get the help they need,” said **Jane Steinmetz, Chairwoman of MTF and Boston Office Managing Principal, Ernst & Young LLP**. “EY is proud to be a member of Mass C.A.R.E.S. and support the important work it is doing in the Commonwealth.”

“Since 2015, Baker-Polito Administration has prioritized addressing the opioid epidemic in collaboration with the Legislature and many stakeholders, including the business community. Public dollars have more than doubled in expanding treatment access, recovery supports and public awareness. However, the stigma around behavioral health conditions – including opioid use disorder – remains a powerful treatment barrier. I applaud Mass C.A.R.E.S. focus on addressing the stigma of behavioral health conditions and treatment in the workplace,” said **Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders**.

“Harvard Pilgrim is proud to collaborate with the Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation’s Mass C.A.R.E.S employer initiative to address the opioid epidemic,” said **Michael Carson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care**. “Employers play a critical role in reaching employees, families and communities to advance education and provide support to those dealing with and impacted by opioid misuse. As a health insurer, Harvard Pilgrim is committed to doing everything we can to drive solutions that help stop this growing epidemic.”

“At Manulife / John Hancock, we are committed to supporting our employees’ wellbeing holistically, and that means providing them with the tools and resources needed to help them and their families,” said **Maria Fraga, Head of Global Benefits and Wellness, Manulife / John Hancock**. “We’re proud to join Mass. C.A.R.E.S. and our peers in the business community to increase awareness and work to find solutions for this important issue.”

“The opioid epidemic is a serious problem with far reaching impacts on Massachusetts individuals, families, communities, and employers,” said **Edward H. Saksay, Executive Vice President of Rockland Trust Company**. “As a large employer committed to the welfare of our colleagues, customers, and the communities that we serve, Rockland Trust is pleased to unite with other companies to take the Mass. C.A.R.E.S. pledge.”

“As a certified clinician with decades of experience and expertise in the treatment of substance/opioid use disorders, I sincerely applaud the Mass. C.A.R.E.S. initiative developed by the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation along with its dedicated organizational partners to address this public health crisis. As with most chronic diseases this epidemic can be fatal if left untreated. I look forward to contributing my expertise to this vital initiative, to raise awareness, create educated and healthy environments allowing employers and employees to get the understanding and help they need” commented **Deirdre Houtmeyers RN, MS, CARN, LADC1**.



## MASS. C.A.R.E.S.

"We applaud the Mass. C.A.R.E.S. initiative to address opioid misuse and the damaging impact it has on workplace performance" said **Lisa K. Desai, Psy.D., MindWise Innovations.**

Research from the National Safety Council revealed that *"when employers initiate and support treatment for prescription drug addiction, it's more effective than beginning treatment at the urging of family or friends"* - underscoring the significance employer engagement has on the wellness of their employees. According to her colleague, **Bryan Kohl, SVP at MindWise, a division of Riverside Community Care,** "we are committed to early identification and treatment of substance misuse, and to creating sustainable workplace solutions to combat opioid abuse."

As **Leslie Russell, the director of the Employer Assistance Program at TeamstersCare** succinctly put it "When our members thrive we thrive. That is why we support recovery friendly worksites."

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### **About Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation**

Founded in 1932, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation is widely recognized as the state's premier public policy organization dealing with state and local fiscal, tax and economic policies. The Foundation's record of high quality research and non-partisan analysis has earned the organization broad credibility on Beacon Hill and across the Commonwealth. Our mission is to provide accurate, unbiased research with balanced, thoughtful recommendations that strengthen the state's finances and economy in order to foster the long-term well-being of the Commonwealth.