

H 6036

THE RHODE ISLAND CLINICIAN WELLNESS AND SUPPORT ACT

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Since the landmark study in 2008, Physician Health Programs (PHPs) have demonstrated a consistent 78-80% abstinence rate over the five-year monitoring period, significantly higher than the general population. In what is now referred to as, "The Blueprint Study," these remarkable results have been replicated in other studies of PHPs in North America.

Other PHP study findings since 2008 include:

- Of those physicians who successfully completed a monitoring agreement, 95% are still practicing medicine.
- Longer periods of monitoring (3-5 years) were associated with higher recovery rates.
- Physicians who participated in structured programs reported improved mental health, lower burnout levels, and higher career satisfaction.
- Most participants were able to continue practicing medicine or return to work safely after treatment.
- Treatment and monitoring are associated with a lowered risk of malpractice claims.

However, we know stigma contributes to physicians and other healthcare professionals from seeking help with substance use disorders and behavioral health illnesses. Stigma from questions about current and previous mental health and/or substance use treatment on state medical licensing applications, employment applications, credentialing, and malpractice insurance applications also contribute to physicians not seeking help.

A Safe Haven encourages physicians to seek help early without fear of punitive consequences, reducing burnout and promoting safer healthcare delivery. The implementation of Safe Haven laws has significantly influenced physician engagement with Physician Health Programs (PHPs), leading to notable increases in voluntary enrollments and earlier interventions.

- In Colorado and West Virginia, when a Safe Haven was enacted in 1990 and 2007 respectively, there has been a twofold increase in self-referrals, outpacing referrals from the medical licensing board.
- The Safe Haven referrals were predominantly self-initiated and occurred earlier in the course of illness, often before any impairment was evident.

Benefits of Safe Haven Programs:

1. **Confidentiality:** Physicians can seek help without fear of professional repercussions.
2. **Early Intervention:** Encourages help-seeking behavior before issues escalate.
3. **Comprehensive Support:** Combines treatment, monitoring, and peer support.
4. **Workforce Retention:** Helps physicians recover and continue practicing, addressing physician shortages.

In summary, the enactment of Safe Haven laws has led to increased and earlier enrollment in physician monitoring programs, marking a significant improvement over the pre-Safe Haven period characterized by delayed interventions and underutilization of available support systems.