

## PROGRAM PROFILE

# Access to Recovery in Massachusetts

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**Access to Recovery in Massachusetts (ATR) provides a range of recovery services to people in treatment and recovery for substance use disorder (SUD). The goal is to help participants continue in their recovery and find stable employment when appropriate. This profile discusses ATR's approach to providing basic needs support, employment services, and recovery coaching for people with SUD, along with lessons and insights shared by leaders and practitioners.**

**This profile was developed as part of a descriptive study of programs that offer employment services to people with SUD; the study was part of the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies (BEES) Project, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The profile draws on video and telephone interviews with program administrators and selected staff members conducted during the summer of 2020. For quick facts on ATR, see Box 1.<sup>1</sup>**

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

ATR is a six-month recovery program that connects individuals who are currently in treatment or recovery for SUD to services in three main areas:

- 1 Subsidies for basic needs** (for example, assistance with transportation, clothing, phones, and health and wellness)
- 2 Employment services**, primarily a job-readiness class and access to a range of occupational training programs
- 3 Recovery coaching.**<sup>2</sup> In the spring of 2020, ATR added a Sober Homes Support Services program, in which it helps people locate sober housing and provides rental assistance.<sup>3</sup>



## LOCAL CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

ATR serves participants in four communities in Massachusetts: Boston, Springfield/Holyoke, Worcester, and New Bedford. About 40 percent of participants enroll in Boston, 30 percent in Worcester, and 15 percent each in New Bedford and Springfield/Holyoke. The program targets people who are in early recovery from opioid use disorder or other substance use disorders, or who are at risk of developing opioid use disorder. To enroll, people must:

- Have a substance use disorder and be motivated to work on their recovery
- Be in the early stages of recovery (two years or less)
- Be connected with providers in the recovery community who refer them to ATR
- Be from at least one of the following target groups: people recently released from incarceration; people currently participating in a Massachusetts Drug Court; current and former U.S. military servicemembers; pregnant, postpartum, and parenting women with children under 18 living in the home; or people currently receiving medication for addiction treatment

The ATR program serves over 3,000 participants per year. According to program data, about three-quarters of ATR participants are men, a majority (57 percent) are White, most (75 percent) have high school diplomas, and 70 percent are unemployed.<sup>4</sup>

All referrals to ATR come from one of over 70 authorized treatment and recovery organizations across the state, including residential homes, outpatient clinics, and centers offering medication for opioid use disorder. Participants retain their relationships with the referring organizations throughout their ATR participation.

**Box 1. Access to Recovery in Massachusetts: Quick Facts**

<b>PROGRAM:</b>	Access to Recovery in Massachusetts
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Boston, Springfield/Holyoke, Worcester, and New Bedford, MA
<b>IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION:</b>	Advocates for Human Potential, a health and human services research and consulting company
<b>PARTICIPANTS SERVED PER YEAR:</b>	3,000 total, of whom about 20 percent receive employment services
<b>SERVICES:</b>	One-on-one assistance from staff members to identify and coordinate services and facilitate access to employment services; job-readiness services and occupational training (provided through partnership with the public workforce system and a network of training providers)
<b>STAFFING:</b>	26 full-time equivalent staff members



## SUD TREATMENT AND RECOVERY SERVICES

ATR does not provide treatment services, as participants enter the program already connected to treatment services elsewhere. ATR provides recovery coaching if participants are interested; participants may receive it either directly from program staff members or through referrals to other organizations. Recovery coaching is standardized in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and requires the completion of a recovery coaching training program. Recovery coaches do not adhere to a specific model of recovery; rather, they help participants navigate their own approach to recovery. For example, recovery coaches may help participants find nearby recovery meetings or work toward the goal of obtaining their driver's licenses. Recovery coaching is often available through the referring treatment provider, and only a small proportion of ATR participants opt for recovery coaching through ATR.



## EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

ATR provides employment services for interested participants through its Career Building Initiative. ATR participants receive \$10 per hour for each hour of class they attend. The Career Building Initiative consists of two main components:

- Paths to Empowerment.** Paths to Empowerment is a job-readiness program developed in coordination with the public workforce system. It is specifically designed for people with SUD. The three-week program meets for 20 hours each week. Typically, new classes start monthly, with a maximum of 14 participants per class, enrolling approximately 150 participants per year. The curriculum covers career exploration, financial literacy, and soft-skills development (for example, communication, conflict resolution, time management, and anger management). During the first week, staff members conduct assessments and help participants build self-confidence and self-esteem while helping them get comfortable with being in a professional environment. The course also addresses communication and problem-solving skills. During the second

week, participants learn computer skills, create résumés and cover letters, and complete online job applications. During the final week, participants work on making budgets, practice interviewing skills (including explaining gaps in their work histories) and apply for jobs.

The staff also ensures participants have appropriate clothes for job interviews and work and connects participants to employment services available from the public workforce system. They maintain a list of in-demand jobs in the service industry and manufacturing, among other areas, for which they rely heavily on Indeed.com. Staff members help participants review their recorded involvement with the criminal legal system, if relevant, so they know what potential employers may see. They also discuss medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and other SUD-specific challenges that may affect their work environment, helping participants identify appropriate employers. For example, individuals using medical marijuana are not well suited to operating heavy machinery or becoming certified nursing assistants. ATR generally requires that participants complete Paths to Empowerment or another job-readiness program before moving on to occupational training, but it makes exceptions for participants who have significant work experience.

- Occupational training.** ATR provides access to dozens of local occupational training programs. The program has a wide range of partnerships with training providers in the four communities in which it operates, though most are in the Boston area. These partnerships allow it to offer a range of training options of different lengths, for different occupations, in different industries. The programs are typically short and must be completed within the six months participants are enrolled in ATR. Training programs range from 3 to 20 weeks, with the majority being between 6 and 12 weeks, and are for occupations such as food preparation; manufacturing; truck driving; heating, ventilation, and air conditioning; commercial cleaning; office support; and customer service. ATR covers the costs of training and has contracts with each training provider, although the programs are not limited to ATR participants.

During training, ATR staff members provide support to participants and work with the training providers to address any barriers that prevent participants from engaging in training or attending classes. For example, a training provider might reach out if a participant misses several classes in a row, and the staff would follow up to address any challenges the participant may be experiencing. Staff members also help navigate any conflicts between treatment or recovery partners and training providers—for example, if requirements to attend recovery

meetings conflict with training attendance requirements. ATR usually pilot tests a training program before establishing a contract with a provider: It will enroll a group of participants at a new occupational training provider before the partnership is formalized, to allow the provider to gain experience in serving people in SUD recovery. Participants receive job placement and retention support from occupational training providers. The program follows up with most program graduates for at least 90 days, although some maintain contact for two years. In addition, anyone who participates in the Paths to Empowerment program is entered into the state job-bank system (and as a result has access to job placement services through the public workforce system for life).



## SUPPORT SERVICES

Each participant receives one on-one assistance from the same staff member throughout the participant's tenure in the program. A central element of ATR is that each participant has access to a \$500 fund that can be used over the six months to cover basic needs such as clothing, transportation, utilities, and cell phone service. ATR works with participants to determine which of these uses will be most beneficial to their recovery and authorize uses of the stipend. The stipend must cover expenses that aid in a participant's recovery, though there is no preapproved list of uses.

Staff members meet with participants at least monthly and sometimes talk with them more frequently by telephone. The nature of these meetings varies based on the services participants receive. Sometimes meetings focus on the allocation of the basic-needs funding and on helping participants identify providers to address unmet support-service needs. Sometimes staff members help participants enrolled in the Career Building Initiative navigate issues that come up during training. Participants also continue to receive additional case management and services from the organizations that originally referred them.

## PARTNERS

All services are provided by partner agencies. Staff members who provide one-on-one assistance are employed by partner organizations. They help participants set goals, authorize uses of the stipend, and refer participants to the Career Building Initiative and other services. Employment services, primarily job-readiness services and occupational training, are provided through a partner-

ship with the public workforce system and a network of over 30 subcontracted training providers in the four communities in which it operates. As noted earlier, ATR also partners with over 70 treatment and recovery organizations across the state for referrals to the program. Participants retain their relationships with the referring organizations while they are in ATR.

## FUNDING SOURCES

ATR has been funded mainly through a series of grants from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The program was originally developed under a SAMHSA ATR grant, and was subsequently funded by two other, consecutive SAMHSA grants to the state: a State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis grant, and a State Opioid Response grant. In 2019-2020, ATR also received a grant awarded by the state to administer a sober home pilot program, in which the organization paid up to 20 weeks of participants' rent at certified sober housing facilities.



## STAFF REFLECTIONS

ATR staff members reported several lessons related to providing recovery and employment services to people with SUD:

- Recovery and sober homes have requirements and restrictions that make it challenging for people to navigate training schedules. Help from staff members in navigating these challenges makes it more feasible for participants to take part in training.
- Staff members noted that many participants say they do not need employment services because they already have con-

nections to employment or have financial support from family, and thus do not make use of ATR's employment services. Staff members also reported that some ATR participants might not opt for employment services because they are involved in informal employment, or because the time commitment required for training makes it difficult for them to participate.

- Different regions had different amounts of training available. In Boston, many organizations offer accessible training, but in other areas, fewer potential training providers exist, or providers are in areas that are inaccessible to participants.

## SNAPSHOT GRAPHIC

Figure 1 summarizes ATR's services.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Box 1 gives staff sizes in full-time equivalents. Full-time equivalents indicate the number of full-time employees at an organization plus the number of part-time employees, standardized to a full-time basis. For example, an organization with 4 full-time and 3 half-time employees would have 5.5 full-time equivalents.
- 2 Recovery coaching is a service provided by a Certified Peer Recovery Coach. To become certified, coaches attend Recovery Coach Academy training offered by the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery. These five days of intensive training focus on providing individuals with the skills they need to guide, mentor, and support anyone who would like to enter into or sustain long-term recovery from an addiction to alcohol or other drugs.
- 3 Sober housing programs provide safe housing and supportive, structured living conditions for people in recovery from SUD.
- 4 These figures represent a snapshot of ATR's program in January 2020.

**Figure 1. Snapshot of Services in ATR’s Treatment and Recovery Programs**

	Activity	Description
<b>TREATMENT AND RECOVERY SERVICES</b> 	Treatment services	Provided by partner organizations for at least 30 days leading up to enrollment at ATR
	Recovery services	Recovery coaching Sober housing rental assistance
<b>SUPPORTIVE SERVICES</b> 	Case management	One-on-one meetings (at least monthly)
	Basic-needs assistance	Basic-needs allotment (\$500) that can be used for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Health and medical bills</li> <li>• Clothes</li> <li>• State identification cards or driver’s licenses</li> <li>• Other essentials</li> </ul>
<b>EMPLOYMENT SERVICES</b> 	Education	Connection to educational services such as high school equivalency courses through the public workforce system
	Job-readiness training	60-hour job-readiness course delivered by the public workforce system, customized for ATR participants
	Occupational training	Access to over 30 occupational training programs through a network of partners

SOURCE: Interviews with ATR leaders and staff members conducted between June and August of 2020.