



Problematic Opioid Use

What is problematic opioid use?

Problematic substance use happens when someone uses drugs or alcohol in a way that has negative effects on their health and life.

Problematic opioid use is using opioids that are not prescribed to you or using prescribed opioids in a manner not intended or instructed by your doctor or pharmacist. It also includes using illegal opioids.

Young Canadians are being exposed to opioids:

- At home through drugs stolen directly from a medicine cabinet
- Through friends, family and acquaintances who share leftover or stolen pills
- Through prescriptions that are prescribed by a doctor to relieve pain
- Via the illegal market by buying opioids or other drugs from the illegal market

When does problematic use become a substance use disorder?

When someone regularly uses drugs or alcohol despite continued negative consequences, they may have a substance use disorder.

This is a medical condition that requires treatment by a health care provider. Substance use disorders can involve both psychological and physical dependence.

If someone you know exhibits one or more of the following behaviours, they may have a substance use disorder:

- constant cravings for the drug
- compulsive drug-seeking
- continuous use despite the harms that the drug is causing, such as:
 - negative effects to their health
 - missing school or work
 - lower grades or marks at school
 - isolation from friends and family members
 - extreme changes in behaviours and mood

But help is available.

How to get help

Getting help can mean different things for different people, and it can take many forms. For some people it may mean complete abstinence (i.e., avoiding opioids or other drugs completely) or continued treatment using opioid replacement therapies such as methadone or buprenorphine

There are also many health and social services available across Canada including non-medical therapies, such as counselling or support from people with lived and living experience.

Cultural ceremony and traditions can provide connection with community.

Today, Indigenous communities strive to work towards integration of the Western biomedical model and Indigenous ways of knowing – a dual system that is grounded to the history context and relevancy of the people. Harmonizing both approaches honours existing resources of traditional knowledge within the communities -- that are both spiritually grounded, and build upon strengths -- to overcome barriers to self-care.

Treatment and recovery are possible

- ✓ **Whether you are looking for help for yourself, a friend or a family member, contact your health care professional**
- ✓ **Need help now? You can reach a Kids Help Phone counsellor 24/7 at 1 800-668-6868**
- ✓ **First Nations and Inuit Mental Health and Wellness 1-855-242-3310**
- ✓ **More resources can be found at Canada.ca/Opioids**