

# Opioid use disorder

Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a complex illness characterized by compulsive use of opioids even when the person wants to stop or when using the substance negatively affects the person's physical and emotional well-being.

## Explain dangers

- Opioids are a class of drugs that includes heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, including oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, and morphine.
- OUD can cause increased opioid tolerance and withdrawal syndrome when use is discontinued. Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, insomnia, muscle cramps, and diarrhea.
- Stigma associated with addiction can keep people from seeking help. Your attitudes and behaviours about addiction have likely been influenced by negative stereotypes, stories, and images about people who use drugs in Canadian society and media.

## Identify controls

- Addiction is a treatable medical condition; it is not a choice. It is deserving of care just like any other medical condition.
- Be respectful, compassionate, and caring toward people who use opioids or other drugs.
- Avoid using stigmatizing or exclusionary language. If you think someone you work with might be struggling with OUD, offer them your support.
- Be a bridge between your co-worker and the appropriate sources of professional help, such as your organization's Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).
- If you believe that your co-worker's substance use is putting workplace safety at risk, you must take action to safeguard other co-workers and yourself.

- Take immediate action when you believe a co-worker is unfit for work. You do not have to know the reason why they are unfit for work or a safety risk to others. This includes if you suspect they may be impaired by alcohol or drugs—such as opioids—while at work. Report your concerns to a supervisor, who should then take appropriate action.

## Demonstrate

- Supervisors must be willing and able to support workers with OUD and those who work with them.
- Ensure that your workers are aware of resources available to them outside of work, such as the [National Overdose Response Service hotline](#) and the [Brave App](#), an overdose detection app.
- Facilitate safety talks related to mental health, addiction, and opioids, and encourage nonjudgmental discussion about these topics among workers.
- Review IHSA resources, such as [Understanding opioid-related harms and the need for naloxone kits in construction workplaces reference guide for employers](#) (W133) and the [Opioid use and workplace implications for trade sectors guide](#) (W132).
- Keep a naloxone kit on site and train workers on how to use it. Naloxone is a life-saving drug that can be used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose if administered immediately.
- If your workplace performs high-risk work, encourage workers to take complete training on administering naloxone and detecting/responding to an overdose or to intoxication.