

# What are opioids?

Opioids originally came from poppy plants. Today, synthetic options are also available. When prescribed by a doctor and used correctly, opioids can be effective for pain relief.

Other opioids (street drugs) are made and distributed illegally. The ingredients and amounts of opioids in street drugs are unregulated and are often unknown.

# What is opioid use disorder?

Opioid use disorder (OUD) is the repeated use of opioids and being unable to stop using them without help. The opioids used can be prescribed medications or illicit (street drugs). When overused or misused, they can cause OUD. Having OUD can be a chronic and life-threatening condition.

A simple way of describing addiction is the presence of the 4 Cs:

- **Craving**
- Loss of **control** of the amount or how often you use
- **Compulsion** to use
- Use despite **consequences**

**Chances are we all know someone who is living with OUD. It can affect anyone of any status, gender, ethnicity or age. They may find it difficult to ask for help because of the stigma around opioid use. Breaking down the stigma begins with knowing and understanding the signs of OUD.**

## Do people have to pay for Suboxone?

The cost of Suboxone is covered for many people. If someone does have to pay, help is available. Contact:

### **Alberta Supports**

**Web** [MyAlbertaSupports.ca](http://MyAlbertaSupports.ca)

**Call** 1-877-644-9992

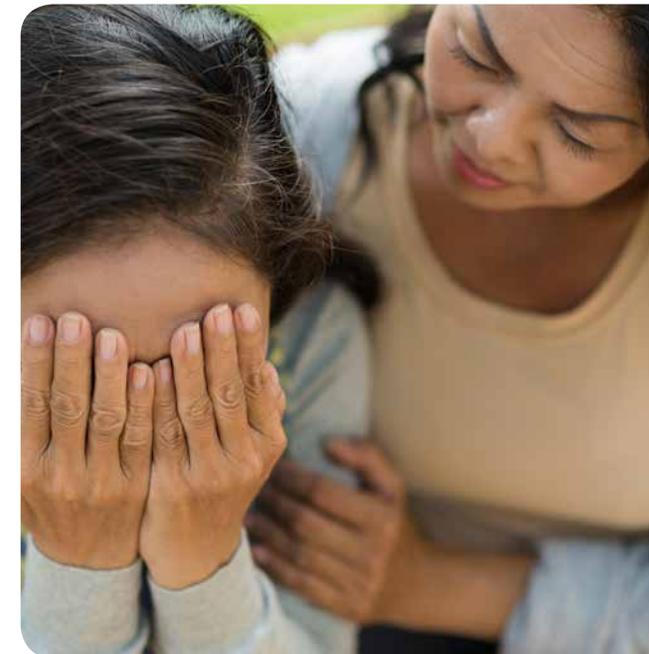
**Visit** Call to find the office closest to you

### **Government of Canada: Health Benefit for First Nations and Inuit Services**

Your local pharmacist can help you get coverage.

# Opioid use disorder & you

**Information for opioid users and their families and friends**





## What does OUD do to the brain?

OUD changes how the brain works by causing it to release high amounts of dopamine. Dopamine is a hormone that controls the reward and pleasure centres in the brain. Extra activity in these centres leads to a “high” feeling and a stronger sense of well-being.

When opioids are taken regularly, the brain stops making the dopamine needed to feel “normal.” This causes a craving or desire for opioids. Continued use of opioids also causes the brain to get used to them.

A drug tolerance is when the body needs more of a drug to get the same feeling or effect.

Withdrawal is the process the body goes through as it gets used to the absence of a drug that was once used.



### What are common signs of withdrawal?

- nausea
- vomiting
- cramps
- diarrhea
- joint pain
- goosebumps
- anxiety
- irritation
- cravings
- muscle aches

## Suboxone can help

Suboxone is a medicine that lowers the risk of an opioid overdose. It is a combination of buprenorphine and naloxone.

When taken properly, naloxone has no effect on the body. Buprenorphine reduces cravings and withdrawal (“dopesick”) symptoms. It helps opioid users feel normal and use opioids less often and in smaller amounts.



Once on a stable dose, some people can stop taking other opioids altogether.

One dose of Suboxone every 24 hours helps to keep people with OUD feeling normal.



## How you can help

Your support is important to someone living with OUD. You can:

- Learn more about OUD, a medical condition, at [drugsafe.ca/opioids](https://drugsafe.ca/opioids).
- Talk openly and with understanding about opioids.
- Encourage them to use stable medication to effectively treat their illness.
- Help stop the stigma and discrimination of opioid use.
- Avoid using hurtful, degrading labels such as “addict,” “junkie” or “dirty.”
- Understand relapse can happen. If it does, you can help someone living with OUD to start treatment again when they are ready. Encourage them to reconnect with a healthcare professional.



## How we can help you

If you or someone you know is living with OUD, Alberta Health Services offers support and treatment. Ask us how you can connect to them.