

# Tackling the Opioid Epidemic



# Why should we be concerned about opioid misuse and overdose?

Opioid overdose is a major public health problem both in Michigan and the United States. With opioid overdose deaths in Michigan tripling in just the last five years, and more than 1,000 people treated in emergency departments daily for not using prescription opioids as directed, it's alarming, but not surprising, that opioid abuse and deaths in the United States have reached the level of a natural disaster.

The epidemic of prescription drug and opioid overdose is a problem experienced across all regions of Michigan, across all age groups and income levels. It results in excess morbidity and mortality, crime, and high medical and societal costs.

<h2>FACTS FROM THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC</h2>		<p>On an average day in the U.S., more than <b>650,000</b> opioid prescriptions are dispensed.</p>	<p>The number of Michigan deaths from an overdose of opioids exceeds deaths from traffic crashes or gun fatalities.</p> 
 <p>Overdose deaths in Michigan have tripled since 2012 – a total of <b>1,365</b> died in 2016.</p>	<p>A recent BCBSA report cites <b>21%</b> of members were prescribed an opioid in 2015.</p> 		
<p>More Americans abuse prescription drugs than the number of cocaine, hallucinogen, methamphetamine and heroin abusers combined.</p>	 	<p>Opioid prescriptions in Michigan <b>increased 41%</b> between 2009 and 2015.</p>	
 <p><b>70%</b> of youths that abuse prescription medications get them from family and friends (sources include home medicine cabinets).</p>	<p><b>One in 4</b> teens report abusing a prescription drug at least once; this translates to 5 million teens (a 33% increase over 5 years).</p>		
<p>Global Consulting firm McKinsey estimates opioid abuse costs society about <b>\$80 billion</b> from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>health care costs</li> </ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lost workplace productivity</li> <li>enforcement and regulation</li> </ul>  	<p><b>91</b> Americans die every day from an opioid overdose</p> 	

## What is an Opioid?

Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain medications available legally by prescription, such as hydrocodone and oxycodone. Opioid pain medications are commonly prescribed for severe pain, often after surgery, and are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor, but because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they can be misused. (CDC)



- 1. Prescription opioids can be addictive and dangerous. It only takes a little to lose a lot.**
- 2. Anyone who takes prescription opioids can become addicted to them.**
- 3. Taking too many prescription opioids can stop a person's breathing—leading to death.**

### Examples of Opioids

oxycodone (OxyContin, Percodan, Percocet)	fentanyl (Duragesic)
hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab, Lorcet)	propoxyphene (Darvon)
diphenoxylate (Lomotil)	hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
morphine (Kadian, Avinza, MS Contin)	meperidine (Demerol)
codeine	methadone



## What Can You do to Prevent Opioid Misuse?

There are a variety of ways to help reduce exposure to opioids and prevent opioid misuse.

- 1. Work with your doctor.** If you are prescribed opioids for pain, work with your doctor to create a plan on how to manage your pain and make the most informed decision. Follow up regularly with your doctor.
- 2. Take and store opioids properly.** Never take opioids in greater amounts or more often than prescribed. Never sell or share prescription opioids. Store prescription opioids in a secure place, out of reach of others (including children, family, friends and visitors).
- 3. Ensure unused drugs are disposed of properly.** Proper drug disposal is important because it reduces the chance that others may accidentally take or intentionally misuse the unneeded medicine.
  - Below are some options to consider when disposing of expired, unwanted, or unused medicines:
    - Michigan State Police (MSP) posts across the state serve as locations where residents can safely and anonymously dispose of expired, unwanted, or unused prescription drugs. The service is free and anonymous.
    - Medicine take-back programs are another way to safely dispose of most types of unneeded medicines. Locate a Michigan community drug take back program: [http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3312\\_4118\\_74618-370212--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3312_4118_74618-370212--,00.html)
    - MI Opioid Prescribing Engagement Network Drug Disposal Map <http://ihpi.umich.edu/our-work/strategic-initiatives/michigan-open/protect-your-community>



### Who to call?

If you or someone close to you needs help for a substance use disorder, talk to your doctor or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP or go to SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator at <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>



Evidenced-based prevention programs and policies are available for communities, schools, health care organizations, and other settings.

## What can my community do to prevent opioid misuse?

- 1. Build awareness of substance use and misuse.** Community groups can mobilize different sectors of the community to foster conversations about substance misuse and substance use disorders and provide opportunities to educate the community, funders and policy makers.
- 2. Promote local drug take-back opportunities.**
- 3. Implement evidence-based prevention interventions and recovery supports.** Effective community-based prevention programs can reduce substance misuse.
- 4. Encourage providers, persons at high risk, family members, and others to learn how to prevent and manage opioid overdose.** Providers should be encouraged to keep their knowledge current about evidence-based practices for the use of opioid analgesics to manage pain, as well as specific steps to prevent and manage opioid overdose.
- 5. Ensure access to treatment for individuals who are misusing or addicted to opioids or who have other substance use disorders.** Effective treatment of substance use disorders can reduce the risk of overdose and help overdose survivors attain a healthier life. Ensure ready access to naloxone. Naloxone is a medication that can reverse the effects of opioid overdose. Opioid overdose-related deaths can be prevented when naloxone is administered in a timely manner.
- 6. Encourage the public to call 911.** An individual who is experiencing opioid overdose needs immediate medical attention. An essential first step is to get help from someone with medical expertise as quickly as possible.



### Prevention

Always follow the instructions you receive with your medication. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or are unsure of how to take your medication.

The following tips can help you or a loved one avoid opioid addiction or overdose:

- Take medicine as prescribed by your doctor
- Do not take more medication or take it more often than instructed
- Never mix pain medicines with alcohol, sleeping pills, or illicit substances
- Store medicine safely where children or pets can't reach it
- Dispose of unused medication promptly

## Know how you can help someone experiencing an opioid overdose

An opioid overdose requires immediate medical attention. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose can help save a life.

### Signs of Overdose

The face is extremely pale and/or clammy to the touch

The body is limp

Fingernails or lips have a blue or purple tint

The person is vomiting or making gurgling noises

He or she cannot be awakened from sleep or is unable to speak

Breathing is slow or stopped

The heartbeat is very slow or stopped



### Who to call?

Call 911 immediately if you or someone you know exhibits any of the symptoms of overdose.

## Obtaining Naloxone

Naloxone is a life-saving medication used to reverse an opioid overdose. Naloxone works by blocking opiate receptor site and can be administered to an individual experiencing symptoms of an opioid overdose. Naloxone can be given by intranasal spray or by injection.

In 2016, Michigan passed a Naloxone standing order law. This allows a pharmacist to dispense Naloxone without an individual prescription and without identifying a particular patient. Although individual doctor prescriptions still work for this, as an alternative, family, friends or others can now obtain Naloxone to use in an emergency without a prescription. A pharmacy that has obtained a standing order can dispense Naloxone to those at risk of an opioid-related overdose, as well as family members, friends or other persons who may be able to assist a person at risk of an overdose.

Link to map of pharmacies approved to dispense Naloxone:

[http://www.michigan.gov/mdhs/0,5885,7-339-71550\\_2941\\_4871\\_79584\\_80133\\_80135\\_80309-426713--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhs/0,5885,7-339-71550_2941_4871_79584_80133_80135_80309-426713--,00.html)

## Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan is taking action on opioid and prescription drug abuse.

Our mission is to prevent addiction before it starts. Our efforts include:

- Partnering with providers and establishing innovative pharmacy programs to reduce the amount of opioids prescribed while ensuring patients get the care they need.
- Supporting community coalitions across the state delivering innovative programs to reduce addiction and overdose.
- Collaborating with law enforcement to identify “doctor-shoppers” as well as unprincipled doctors that illegally over-prescribe and flood communities with opioids
- Communications and advocacy efforts to increase awareness and strengthen laws

We also seek to ensure high-quality, evidence-based treatment for those suffering from addiction.





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