# Opioids FAQs

# About opioids in Tennessee

# What is an opioid?

* Prescription opioids can be prescribed by doctors to treat moderate to severe pain, but can also have serious risks and side effects.
* Common prescription opioids are oxycodone (OxyContin), hydrocodone (Vicodin), morphine and methadone.
* Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever use for treating severe pain, typically advanced cancer pain.
* Heroin is an illegal opioid.

What is opioid misuse?

* Misuse is defined as taking a prescription in higher amounts or longer than recommended by a physician, using someone else’s prescription, or using opioids to get high.
* An estimated ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­ Tennesseans misused opioids in 2016.
* 25% of individuals who misuse opioids become physically dependent.

# What is opioid dependence?

* Dependence is defined as withdrawal when an individual stops taking an opioid.
* Opioid dependence can occur when opioids are taken for too long a time period or too many opioids are taken.
  + The amount of opioid prescription per person in 201\_ was \_\_x higher than in 2000.
* People develop a tolerance for opioids and need to take more of a drug to get the same pain relief or prevent withdrawal symptoms.
  + Even at low doses, taking an opioid pain reliever more than 3 months increases the risk of addiction by 15 times.

# What happens when you misuse or become dependent on opioids?

* If you are pregnant, your baby like you can become dependent on opioids and go through withdrawal symptoms even if the opioid is prescribed for you.
* Tolerance—you might need to take more of the medication for the same pain relief
* Physical dependence—you have symptoms of withdrawal when the medication is stopped
  + Withdrawal from opioids is painful, but usually not life-threatening.
  + Early withdrawal symptoms include agitation, anxiety, muscle aches, increased tearing, insomnia, runny nose, sweating and yawning.
  + Late withdrawal symptoms include abdominal cramping, diarrhea, dilated pupils, goose bumps, nausea, and vomiting. [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000949.htm]
* Overdose—you can stop breathing and die when you take too many opioids or combine opioids with other drugs.

Who is affected by opioid dependence?

* Opioid dependence affects people in all economic groups.
* About half (54%) of individuals dependent on opioids live in poverty. [National Survey on Drug Use and Health, year]

# Which Tennessee counties are most affected by opioid misuse?

* Opioid dependence affects Tennessee counties differently.
* Heroin addiction, crimes and drug seizures are greatest in urban and suburban areas.
* Prescription opioid addiction, crimes and seizures are greatest in rural areas and small towns.
* East Tennessee counties in Appalachia have been particularly affected by the opioid epidemic. [TDMHSAS, TBI]

# How does opioid dependence impact individuals and families?

* Increased drug overdose deaths
* Loss of stable living situation
* Increased number of parents unable to care for their children
* Decreased job opportunities
* Increased health care costs
* Increased involvement with the criminal justice system

# What is treatment for opioid dependence?

* Opioid dependence or abuse can be treated with:
  + Substance abuse programs: outpatient, residential and detoxification
  + Medication assisted treatment (MAT)
    - Office-based opiate treatment facilities
    - Methadone treatment programs
* Recovery services include:
  + Transitional housing or sober living
  + Pastoral or spiritual support
  + Faith communities
  + Case management
  + Recovery skills training
  + Employment assistance
  + Relapse prevention
* Criminal justice programs such as recovery courts help individuals involved in the criminal justice system access treatment and recovery services including recovery courts

Is there help for individuals who have low incomes?

* TDMHSAS funds substance abuse treatment at licensed alcohol and drug treatment facilities for individuals who are over 12 years old and are indigent with incomes less than 133% of the Federal Poverty Level with no insurance or limited insurance.
* TennCare provides substance abuse treatment services to Medicaid enrollees with a substance use diagnosis.

How can opioid misuse be prevented?

* Educate prescribers about Tennessee’s Chronic Pain Guidelines.
* Educate individuals about:
  + The risk of misusing opioids
  + The dangers of sharing medications with others
  + Proper disposal of unused medications
* Work with others to help communities become drug free
* Involve faith communities