



## Opioids 101: Information you can use

### Why are so many people in Indigenous communities addicted to opioids?

- Opioids are misused to cope with reality in the same way people use alcohol and other substances: the temporary high fills them with confidence, enthusiasm, energy, and comfort.
- Many contributing factors; people are trying to cope with their reality of living in poverty/poor housing/no employment, intergenerational trauma & childhood trauma, both of which may be causing nightmares, depression, anxiety, trouble forming relationships, and low self-esteem.
- Addiction can happen within 2 weeks, and often spreads quickly to family members, friends, even whole communities.

### Why is it so difficult for people to stop using opioids?

- Opioids change the way our brain functions and the severity of this change depends on how much is used and how often.
- Extreme withdrawal symptoms, range from unbearable pain, muscle aches, nausea, insomnia, anxiety, depression, to strong cravings.
- Some attempt suicide if they cannot obtain opioids to relieve their symptoms.

### What are methadone and buprenorphine (Suboxone)?

- Methadone and buprenorphine (Suboxone) are medications to treat addiction.
- Both medications relieve withdrawal cravings and symptoms for the entire day without causing an opioid high.
- These medications are necessary for most people in the same way medication is necessary to save lives due to other chronic health issues such as: diabetes, heart disease, or inflammatory disease.

### What's the difference between methadone and buprenorphine (Suboxone)?

- Methadone has a high risk of overdose; fatal overdoses are rare with buprenorphine (Suboxone).
- Methadone treatment requires access to a pharmacy and a doctor with special training.
- Buprenorphine (Suboxone) can be prescribed by a doctor and soon by Nurse Practitioners in Ontario.
- Buprenorphine (Suboxone) prescriptions can be stored and provided in a First Nations community, including by trained community staff supervised by a nurse or physician.

### Isn't giving people buprenorphine (Suboxone) or methadone just switching one addicting drug for another?

- NO! Opioid misuse quickly triggers withdrawal symptoms, which can take over a person's life, often spending their whole day getting and taking the drug in a desperate effort to feel normal and avoid withdrawal.
- Buprenorphine/Methadone do not create feelings of euphoria like being high, or withdrawal and last until the next day's dose. This reduces harms to the individual, family and whole community.
- People on these medications can return to work, school, or their family without any impairment in their thinking or functioning.

### Aren't methadone and buprenorphine (Suboxone) just band-aids? Shouldn't treatment be based on counselling that addresses the root causes of addiction – trauma, poverty, and despair?

- Culturally based and/or psychological counselling is essential for achieving wellness and long-term recovery.
- Treatment for long-term recovery is most effective when there is both culturally based or psychological counselling & methadone or buprenorphine (Suboxone) treatment.
- People can participate in counselling and treatment activities without being tormented by cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

### What should I do if my community doesn't have access to a clinic that provides good addiction care?

- If there are members of your community who would benefit from buprenorphine (Suboxone) treatment but there is no access to convenient, high-quality care, you and other members of your community should consider setting up your own buprenorphine (Suboxone) treatment program.
- Sioux Lookout and other communities in northern Ontario have set up a number of buprenorphine (Suboxone) programs over the past several years, and these programs can be used as a model for your community.

**The Thunderbird Partnership Foundation has created a First Nations Opioid Survey to help communities gain a better understanding of the extent of the opioid crisis at the local level. Contact us for more supports and to learn how your community can take the survey.**

info@thunderbirdpf.org  
1 (866) 763-4714  
www.thunderbirdpf.org

