



Overdose Prevention and Response Glossary

This glossary is to clarify words and phrases used in reference to [opioid overdose prevention](#) and response. Language changes and evolves over time and the definitions in this document may be updated in the future to reflect current research and understanding of [substance use](#).

Addiction

Behaviour characterized by a loss of control and a continued craving for the behaviour despite negative consequences. Current medical terminology identifies drug addiction as “[substance use](#) disorder.” Addiction is a complex issue which has many causes, including biological, psychological, social, economic, and spiritual factors.

Adulterant

Chemical or compound that may be added to illegal drugs typically without the knowledge of the consumer to increase profitability.

Analogue

Chemical compound that is structurally similar to another but differs slightly in composition. For example: [Carfentanil](#) is a [fentanyl](#) analogue.

Analgesic

Medicines that relieve pain.

Buprenorphine

Analgesic that may be prescribed to control or moderate severe pain or to treat [opioid](#) use disorder as an opioid substitution medication. It can be administered under the tongue by tablet, by injection, or by a [transdermal](#) skin patch. In Canada, buprenorphine is most often provided in combination with [naloxone](#) a formulation which reduces the



risk of diversion and non-medical use. It helps with [withdrawal](#) symptoms and cravings for [opioids](#). Also known as [Suboxone](#).

Carfentanil

Synthetic [opioid](#) which can be up to 100 times more toxic than [fentanyl](#). Use of this toxic drug, even in very small amounts, could result in [overdose](#). It is used as a tranquilizer for large animals such as elephants.

Carries (in the context of [Opioid Substitution Therapy](#))

Measured daily doses of [opioid](#) substitution [treatment](#) medications (e.g., buprenorphine/[naloxone](#) or [methadone](#)) that patients are allowed to take home with them for self-administration outside of a pharmacy. Carries are only prescribed by a health provider once a patient has become stable through success in their treatment. The number of doses they are allowed to take home can vary, but is usually enough for a few days or up to one week.

Club drugs

Psychoactive (mind-altering) substances often used at all-night dances or raves. Some examples of club drugs are ecstasy ([MDMA](#)), methamphetamine, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), flunitrazepam (Rohypnol), and ketamine. The term “club drug” is not a scientific one, and substances are varied and have different pharmacological properties.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

A form of psychosocial treatment that helps people understand their patterns of thinking and behaviour to learn healthier skills, habits and coping techniques. CBT is flexible, easily customized, supports [self-efficacy](#) and can help with self-management of mental health issues, including [substance use](#) problems.



Concurrent Disorder

Condition in which a person experiences two medical problems, such as having a mental illness and a [substance use disorder](#). Concurrent disorder can refer to a wide range of co-occurring mental illnesses and substance use issues.

Consumption

Taking a substance into the body by ingestion, inhalation, injection, or absorption via mucous membranes (including in the nose, through snorting) or through the skin.

Crystal Meth

A smokable chemical variation of methamphetamine (also called jib, ice, crystal, speed or crank). Methamphetamine is a potent, long-acting synthetic stimulant drug. Use of crystal meth can lead to adverse health effects, including psychotic episodes.

Dependence

A need for repeated doses of a substance to feel good or avoid feeling bad, despite potential bad effects or consequences.

Diacetylmorphine

The medical term for the pharmaceutical-grade [opioid](#) that is more commonly known as [heroin](#).

Discrimination

Action or a decision that treats a person or a group negatively for reasons such as their race, age, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation or ability.

Dope Sick

A slang term for [withdrawal](#), or a group of symptoms that happen when a person stops or decreases use of a substance that they are dependent on. Long-acting medications like [methadone](#) or [buprenorphine/naloxone](#) can help avoid withdrawal symptoms while



on [opioid](#) substitution treatment ([OST](#)).

Fake Oxys

Illegally produced counterfeit pills that are made to look like a pain medication that used to be available in Canada (Oxycontin).

Fentanyl

An [opioid](#) pain medication. Fentanyl has medical uses and can be prescribed by a physician to help control severe pain, but in recent years it is also being produced in illegal labs and sold on the streets, often mixed with other drugs (such as [heroin](#), cocaine, and others). Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times more toxic than morphine, which makes the risk of accidental [overdose](#) higher.

Harm Reduction

Policies, programs and practices that aim to reduce the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of psychoactive [substance use](#) for people unable or unwilling to stop using immediately. Harm reduction is a pragmatic response that focuses on keeping people immediately safe and minimizing death, disease, and injury from high-risk behaviour. It involves a range of strategies and services to enhance the knowledge, skills, resources, and supports for individuals, families and communities to be safer and healthier.

Heroin

A slang term for an illegal [opioid](#) street drug, originally the trade name for [diacetylmorphine](#). It is usually a white, odorless, bitter crystalline compound that is derived from morphine.

Heroin Assisted Treatment

Treatment that includes the provision of pharmaceutical grade heroin ([diacetylmorphine](#)) under medical supervision, along with other interventions that support people who are



seeking treatment for [opioid](#) use disorder.

Housing

Where a person lives. A person's housing situation can influence the impact [substance use](#) has on their health and can also compromise the effectiveness of treatment. People who do not have stable and supportive home environments (such as those living on the streets, in unstable housing or with a substance-dependent or abusive partner) need supports to help them find stable housing.

Hydromorphone (trade name Dilaudid)

An [opioid](#) medication used to treat severe pain, which has also been studied in Canada as a medication to assist in the treatment of [opioid](#) use disorder, for patients who have not responded to other forms of treatment. This drug is available as an oral tablet, a liquid solution and extended-release tablet that is taken orally. It can also be administered as an intravenous (IV) injection from a healthcare provider.

Illicit

A thing or act that is forbidden, disapproved of, or not permitted for moral or ethical reasons by custom, society, laws or rules. It can be something illegal, or may not be specified by law.

Low Threshold/Low Barrier

Services that have very few requirements for people to access them. For example, services may not require clients to be seeking or to achieve abstinence from [substance use](#) in order to participate.

Methadone

A long-acting [opioid](#) medication that may be prescribed to treat pain or [opioid](#) use disorder. It relieves [withdrawal](#) symptoms, reduces the physiological cravings and allows body functions to become stable.



Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)

Psychoactive (mind-altering) substance. Also known as ecstasy or E.

Naloxone

Medication that can reverse the effects of an [opioid overdose](#) when injected into an arm, buttocks or thigh muscle or when administered as an intranasal spray. Within two to five minutes, naloxone can reverse slowed breathing. Also known as Narcan.

Opioid Agonist Treatment

See [Opioid Substitution Treatment](#).

Opioid Substitution Treatment

An evidence-based treatment for opioid use disorder, which involves the prescription and daily administration of medications that are substitutes for [opioids](#) such as [heroin](#) or [fentanyl](#). It relieves [withdrawal](#) symptoms, reduces the physiological cravings and allows body functions to become stable. [Methadone](#) and buprenorphine/[naloxone](#) (also called [Suboxone](#)) are the most common medications used for opioid substitution treatment. Also known as Opioid Agonist Treatment, Opioid Substitution Therapy and Opioid Assisted Treatment.

Opioid Use Disorder

A problematic pattern of [opioid](#) use that causes clinically significant impairment or distress. A diagnosis is based on criteria such as unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control use, as well as use resulting in social problems and a failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, or home. Opioid use disorder can also be called “opioid [dependence](#)” or “opioid [addiction](#).”

Opioids



A class of substances used to reduce pain in the body. Opioids can be legal and illegal. Examples of opioids include [heroin](#), morphine, [fentanyl](#), [methadone](#) and codeine.

Outreach

Community-based services that are designed to improve health and reduce drug-related risk or harm. These services are designed to link people to health or social services by sending staff to places where people who use substances frequently spend time.

Over the Counter Drugs

Medicines you can buy without a prescription.

Overdose (OD)

Use of a substance in excess, resulting in negative health effects on the person who consumed the substance. An overdose may or may not be fatal.

Overdose [Prevention](#) Sites

Services in some parts of British Columbia that were established as a response to the [opioid](#) overdose public health emergency, which provide people who use drugs a space where they can be monitored by health professionals, and receive treatment for an overdose if needed.

Oxycodone

An [opioid](#) analgesic used to relieve moderate to severe pain.

OxyNeo/OxyContin

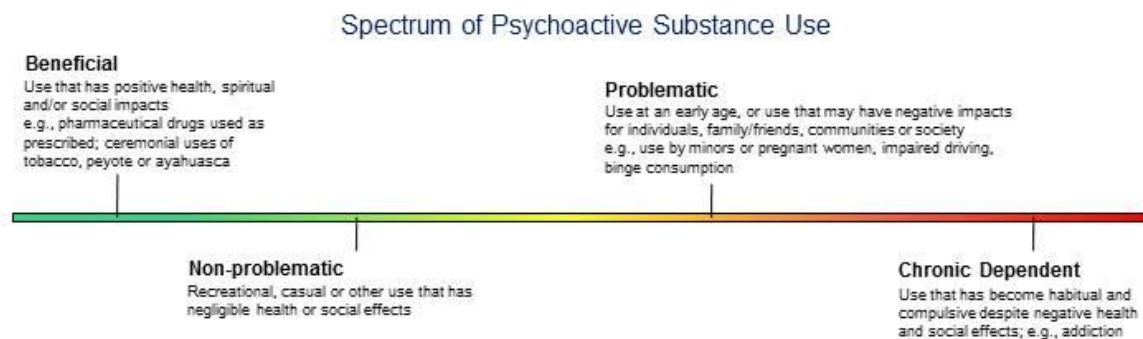
A time-released formulation of the [opioid](#) pain medication oxycodone. It was developed in 1995 for people needing around-the-clock pain relief, so they don't have to take pills as often. OxyContin is no longer sold in Canada, replaced by a new tamper-resistant formulation, OxyNeo.

Person-First Language

A non-[stigmatizing](#) way of referring to a person that does not prioritize their behaviour or health condition. Acknowledges that a person’s condition, illness or behaviour is not that person’s defining or primary characteristic. For example, “A person who uses drugs,” or “A person living with HIV.”

People Who Use Drugs

People who use [psychoactive substances](#), which can occur along a spectrum of use.



First Nations Health Authority, Province of British Columbia and Government of Canada. (2018). *A Path Forward: BC First Nations and Aboriginal People's Mental Wellness and Substance Use – 10 Year Plan*. Vancouver, BC.

Some people choose abstinence and use no substances at all, a decision which should be honoured, respected and supported. Some people who use substances do so in beneficial or non-problematic ways, such as drinking coffee to stay alert, or ceremonial uses of tobacco, peyote or ayahuasca; others drink alcohol moderately in social situations and do not experience problems. Some people engage in [problematic substance use](#)-for example, using at an early age, using while pregnant, or driving while impaired-which increase the risk of harms that can and should be prevented. Some people develop chronic dependent substance use, or [addiction](#), which may require treatment or other drug-related health and community supports. Talking about “people who use drugs” is preferable to labelling them as an “addict,” or “user,” underscoring the



humanity of the person first.

Prevention

Measures that prepare and support individuals, groups, communities and larger systems in reducing the onset of [problematic substance use](#) or minimizing harms from substance use.

Process [Addiction](#)

The compulsive and persistent engagement in a behaviour or action (other than drug use) that causes serious negative consequences to a person's physical, mental, social and/or economic well-being. Examples of behaviours that for some individuals may become process addictions are gambling, video gaming, work, sex, shopping and internet use.

Problematic Substance Use

Instances or patterns of [substance use](#) associated with physical, psychological, economic or social problems or use that constitutes a risk to health, security or well-being of individuals, families or communities. Some forms of problematic substance use involve potentially harmful types of use that may not constitute clinical disorders, such as impaired driving, using a substance while pregnant, binge [consumption](#) and routes of administration (i.e. ways of taking a substance into one's body) that increase harm. Problematic substance use also includes "substance use disorders" (defined as [dependence](#) or "[addiction](#)"). Problematic substance use is not related to the legal status of the substance used, but to the amount used, the pattern of use, the context in which it is used and, ultimately, the potential for harm. See also "[Addiction](#)," "[Substance Use](#)" and "Substance Use Disorders."

Psychoactive Substance

A plant or chemical that affects the brain and associated mental functions, such as



sensations of pain and pleasure, moods, views of reality, thinking ability, motivation or being alert. Examples include coffee and tea (caffeine), alcohol, tobacco (nicotine), cannabis, coca (cocaine), amphetamines, LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, opium and derivative [opioid](#) medications.

Recovery

A process of change through which individuals work to improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. Recovery is built on access to evidence-based clinical treatment and recovery support services for all populations.

Resilience

The ability to cope with challenges, process negative feelings, bounce back from bad experiences, and move forward in the face of adversity. It is vital for health and well-being. The four key “protective factors” that lead to resilience and help young people grow into thriving adults are: connectedness; opportunities for participation, contribution and high self-expectations.

Risk Factors

Characteristics of people or environments that increase the chance of developing, prolonging or intensifying [substance use](#) problems.

Self-efficacy

Believing in yourself, your abilities and knowing or trusting that you can succeed at setting and achieving a goal.

Stereotypes

An oversimplified, generally over-exaggerated belief that all members of a certain group act and think in the same way. People use negative stereotypes to justify [discrimination](#).



Stigma

Disapproval of a person or group by society, community or larger group, based on perceived characteristics, which significantly discredits the person or group in the eyes of others, particularly when the person or group differs from the larger cultural norms. For example, beliefs and attitudes about people living with mental illness or substance [dependence](#) that leads to negative stereotyping and prejudice against them and their families. These beliefs are often based on fear, ignorance, misunderstanding and misinformation.

Suboxone™

The brand name of a medication that contains a four-to-one ratio of buprenorphine and [naloxone](#), and is prescribed for [opioid](#) substitution [treatment](#). Buprenorphine activates opioid receptors in the brain and relieves pain up to a certain point. The result is that treatment with Suboxone virtually eliminates cravings for opioids in people with opioid use disorder who use it as directed by a qualified medical professional. It can be taken once per day as a pill or other format.

Substance Use

The intentional [consumption](#) of a [psychoactive](#) substance (legal or illegal) in order to modify or alter consciousness. [Psychoactive substances](#) include alcohol, caffeinated beverages, tobacco, certain medications, solvents and glues and a range of controlled (i.e. illegal) substances, such as cannabis, cocaine and [heroin](#). The use of psychoactive substances is an almost universal human cultural behaviour and has been engaged in since the beginning of human history. Substance use can occur for a variety of reasons – including medical, scientific, spiritual or religious, social, pleasurable or habitual – and its effects can range to beneficial to severely problematic, depending on the quantity, frequency, method or context of use.

Substance Use Disorder

A diagnostic term for an illness in which the use of one or more [psychoactive](#)



[substances](#) leads to clinically significant symptoms - including craving and inability to stop using despite negative consequences - that are detrimental to the individual's physical and mental health, or the welfare of others. The terms substance use disorder is the preferred current medical term for what is more commonly known as drug [addiction](#) or [dependence](#).

Supervised [Consumption](#) Services (SCS)

Health services where people consume drugs (that they have obtained elsewhere) in a hygienic environment, under the supervision of trained staff. The intent is to reduce the number of [overdose](#) deaths, connect people who use illegal drugs with healthcare services, including treatment and reduce public drug use and discarded used needles. SCS also provides opportunities to engage in other health and social services.

Tapering

The gradual reduction of a dose of medication such as [methadone](#). This should only be done with the supervision of a health care provider.

Titration (Stabilization)

The process of determining the lowest dose of a substance needed to achieve the desired effects. This involves starting out on a low dose and safely working up to the dose that provides a stable feeling of comfort and wellness with minimal side effects.

Transdermal Skin Patch

A method of administering medication, in a stick-on patch that is applied to skin. Also known as a skin patch.

Trauma

An experience that overwhelms an individual's capacity to cope. Trauma can be devastating, interfere with a person's sense of safety, self and [self-efficacy](#), as well as the ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Traumatized people may feel



terror, shame, helplessness, powerlessness, and may engage in [problematic substance use](#) or unhealthy behaviours as a way to cope. Trauma can include events experienced in early life, such as child abuse, neglect, disrupted attachment or witnessing violence. It can also be rooted in events later in life such as violence, accidents, natural disasters, war, sudden unexpected loss and other life events that are out of one's control.

Withdrawal

Symptoms that may occur when a person with a [substance use](#) disorder or drug [dependence](#) stops or decreases use. These symptoms can typically be managed through appropriate treatment (withdrawal management).

Withdrawal Management

Quitting or cutting down on [substance use](#) under the care of a health professional. The aim is to alleviate pain and to achieve a temporary state of abstinence from the substance(s) and to treat any physical or psychiatric conditions.

W-18

A lethal [fentanyl analogue](#).