



Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 8 - UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER AND OVERDOSE AWARENESS

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR
NEWCOMERS**

Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!



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AUGUST:



Understanding Substance Use Disorder and Overdose Awareness

In Canada, approximately 21% of the population (or 6 million people) will experience a substance use disorder or addiction at some point in their lifetime. According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, the top addictions in Canada are: alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, gambling, methamphetamine, opioids, and prescription drugs. In Volume 8 of AIMGA's Living Well with AIMGA newsletter, international medical graduates will share information focused on addictions and drug overdose awareness. International Overdose Awareness Day will be recognized, which is a global event held on August 31st each year to remember those who have passed away far too soon from overdose deaths.

Sources: [Penington Institute, 2023](#); [Moore, 2021](#); [Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, 2023](#)

RESOURCES & TIPS TO GET STARTED

[The increase in benzodiazepine-laced drugs and related risks in Canada](#) - Article

[Spotting as a risk mitigation method](#) - Article

[Learn about stigma and how to change how you talk about drug use](#) - Website



Videos:



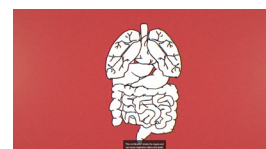
[Stigma and Substance Use](#)



[TEDX What causes opioid addiction, and why is it so tough to combat?](#)



[The Opioid Crisis](#)



[TEDX The dangers of mixing drugs](#)



[Addiction: Tomorrow Is Going To Be Better
Brandon Novak's Story](#)

HOT TOPIC:

Opioid Crisis: A National Burden



Opioids, our focus topic has become a name associated with national crises in many countries around the world. Opioid use can have negative consequences on the health, economy, productivity, and social aspects of communities.

Opioids are drugs typically prescribed and used for pain relief primarily. Other conditions they can be used for are moderate to severe diarrhea and cough. These drugs have a high propensity to be used improperly and abused because they are known to induce a state of euphoria, “feeling high”. Common examples of opioids include, but are not limited to, morphine, hydromorphone, oxycodone, lenoltec, fentanyl, and medical heroin.

Opioid use can have negative consequences on the health, economy, productivity, and social aspects of communities. The opioid crisis is a complex issue, and it continues to be a national burden to Canada, and the world at large. According to WHO (2021), about 500,000 deaths are attributed to drug use globally, with over 70% of these being related to opioids, and more than 30% of these because of overdose.

In Canada, there have been more than 9,000 opioid-related deaths since 2016 and approximately 11 deaths occurred daily in 2017 due to opioid overdoses. The fastest-growing population requiring hospital care from opioid overdoses are ages 15-24 years.

The Canadian government continues to combat this crisis using different approaches, which include but are not limited to, increasing access to treatment, stigma awareness and reduction, free naloxone kit availability, approval of safe and supervised user sites to prevent overdose, and the protection of overdose witness callers.

Furthermore, the government has shown its commitment to providing long-lasting solutions, through a comprehensive public health approach. These are evident through over \$1 billion that has been made available since 2017 to ensure people get the support they desire and need, through continued access to harm reduction services, evidence-based treatment, promotion, and prevention activities that reduce stigma, fund awareness, and support research and surveillance initiatives.

Sources: [Health Canada, 2019](#); [Health Canada, 2023](#); [Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2023](#); [Belzak & Halverson, 2018](#);

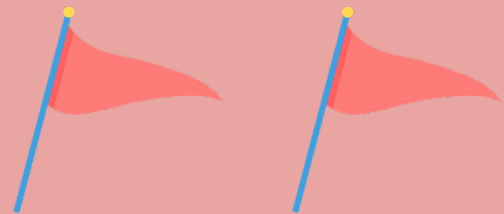


RED FLAGS

- 1 Recognizing warning signs** that indicate there might be a substance use disorder with a family member or friend starts with awareness. Are you noticing that they are acting differently than before, or they are having troubles in different aspects of their life? Look for changes in: **personality** (e.g., isolation, extreme moods, difficulties with alertness, memory or concentration, loss of interest); **habits around their drug or alcohol use** (e.g., drinking first thing in the morning or after work, using more often, spending more money on drugs and alcohol, choosing new activities and friends); and **basic parts of their life** (e.g., reduced work performance, decreased health, tense relationships).
- 2 Signs and Symptoms of an overdose** include nausea and vomiting, severe stomach pain and abdominal cramps, chest pain, dizziness, diarrhea, loss of balance and coordination, unresponsiveness, limp, seizures, paranoia,

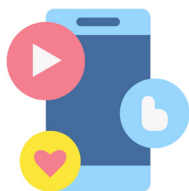
slow or erratic pulse, gurgling sounds, blue lips or fingers, etc. These signs depend on the [type of overdose](#) (alcohol, opioid, stimulant, benzodiazepine, etc.)

- 3 In the event of an overdose**, call 911, administer CPR, keep airways clear, administer Naloxone/Narcan if possible, try and keep the person conscious, lay them on their side to prevent choking, stay with them until the paramedics arrive. If the person is unconscious but breathing normally, put them in the [recovery position](#). To learn about when and how to perform CPR, [click here](#).



Other Types of Addictions

- Similar to tobacco or drugs, **screen time / video games** can become an addiction if it damages your health and relationships, and you are unable to control it. To keep this in moderation, you can 1) keep screens out of bedrooms, 2) create structured, screen-free times, such as during mealtimes, and before bedtime, and 3) model other methods of relaxation and entertainment, such as taking a walk, playing a game, or reading a book, etc. If you are concerned about a child or loved one's use of screen time, consider consulting with a behavioural or addictions specialist (Child Mind Institute, 2023; [Healthline, 2023](#)).
- Compulsive gambling** is another addictive disorder that many people struggle with. Gambling is known to stimulate the brain's reward system, much like drugs and alcohol can. [Learn more here](#).





HEALTH REMINDERS!

Safe Injection Sites and Practices

- By ensuring safe use / injection sites and adopting best practices, we can protect lives in many ways. These assist with connecting people to social services and healthcare, reducing the risk of accidental overdose, reducing public drug use and discarded drug equipment, reducing the spread of infectious diseases, and reducing strain on emergency medical services.
- These sites provide a safe and non-judgmental environment for people to bring their own drugs to use; they offer sterile equipment and trained healthcare professionals who are ready to assist in case of emergencies. By utilizing these sites, individuals can access harm reduction services, including education and support for addiction treatment. See the [resources](#) section of the newsletter for more.
- Whether you inject opioids for medical reasons or struggle with addiction, following safe injection practices is paramount. Here are some vital reminders to keep in mind: 1) use sterile equipment, 2) choose a safe injection site on the body (most to least safe - arms, hands, legs, feet, groin, and neck), 3) prepare and clean the site properly beforehand, 4) find the right vein, 5) dispose of your equipment safely and never throw them in the regular waste bin, 5) seek support through healthcare providers, helplines, etc.

Starting a Difficult Conversation

- Are you unsure how to talk to your loved ones and/or your healthcare provider about substance addiction? Some tips to start a conversation: **1) learn the facts** about substances you are concerned about and their risks, **2) choose the time and place** with care (private location, calm setting and mood), **3) show concern and compassion** (e.g., tell them you are worried about them, you love them, you want what's best for them, and share a personal experience of a habit you will like to change), **4) listen** (acknowledge their feelings, listen for underlying reasons for why they do it), **5)**

Sources: [Health Canada, 2023](#); [Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction, 2023](#); [U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2019](#)

don't stigmatize (be mindful of your tone and avoid judgement), **6) respect** where they are at (e.g., offer supports and resources, but recognize the decision to seek help is ultimately theirs), and **7) be patient** (e.g., do not rush the conversation or feel you need to find a solution immediately, you may have to come back to the conversation at a later time).

- Learn more about how to approach a conversation [here](#). Learn more about stigma and why words matter [here](#). Learn more about the substance use spectrum [here](#).
- If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use, there are services available to anyone, anywhere, any time: [Canada wide services; Help Guide](#). Encourage a family member or friend to call, visit, or read more information online. You can also offer to go with them to get help as a form of support.
- Remember that your health and mental health always comes first, and it is not your responsibility to take care of all of your friends' and family members' problems. Seek help for yourself if you are struggling with the weight of caring for someone who is struggling with substance abuse.

Other Reminders

- About 22% of Canadians over the age of 15 years old use psychoactive prescription drugs in some form according to the 2017 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey. To remain safe, is important to: read the directions on the label and ask your healthcare provider how much you should take and when, never skip taking your prescription medicine, talk to your healthcare provider before you stop taking your medicines, and only take the suggested dose.
- Lock your medications (prescription and otherwise) in a safe, private place.
- Avoid alcohol consumption during pregnancy to reduce your baby's risk of developing [Fetal Alcohol Syndrome](#), which causes brain damage and growth problems.

DID YOU KNOW?



- Naloxone is a drug that temporarily reverses effects of an opioid poisoning or overdose. **Naloxone kits** have successfully reversed thousands of overdoses across Canada. There are two types of take-home naloxone kits available, a [spray](#) and an [injectable](#). Take-home kits are also free and available at most pharmacies, walk in clinics, or local health agencies for anyone who is at risk of an overdose. They can be obtained anonymously. Naloxone is used by first-responders, including paramedics and firefighters to help address Canada's opioid crisis. Always call 911 call when administering Naloxone.
- **Studies** have revealed a strong link between substance abuse and brain injury? Opioid overdoses can have detrimental results on the brain from slowing breathing/heart rate and oxygen-deprivation. The parts of the brain that use the most energy and oxygen are the most vulnerable.
- In Canada, approximately 21% of the population (or 6 million people) will experience a substance use disorder or addiction at some point in their lifetime.
- Young people (ages 15-24) have more substance use disorders that mostly consist of alcohol, marijuana, non-prescription pain meds, and tobacco.
- The cost of burden related to substance use is around \$ 40 billion yearly in Canada which is mostly from healthcare utilization, law enforcement, and workforce loss. Interestingly, **alcohol and tobacco constitute most of the cost.**
- Treatment and supports are available to fight both addiction and mental health disorders. Men receive more treatment than women and alcohol use disorder is the most common for treatment sought out.
- People with mental health disorders use twice the number of substances compared to the average population. Likewise, those with substance use disorder have three times the risk of mental health disorders. Thus, both entities are closely linked and need to be addressed collaboratively.

Sources: [Addictions Help, 2023](#); [CAMH, 2023](#); [Acquired Brain Injury Partnership Project, 2022](#); [Brain Injury, Canada, 2022](#);



MYTH OR FACT?

Sources: [Heather Hayes & Associates, 2020](#); [US Food and Drug Administration, 2019](#); [National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2021](#); [Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addiction, 2019](#); [First Nations Health Authority, n.d.](#); [HealthLinkBC, 2020](#); [FaceltTogether, n.d.](#)

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

People who use drugs or abuse alcohol are bad.

It is not possible to overdose on alcohol.

Only new substance users overdose.

People have to hit "rock bottom" before they can get well.

Harm reduction enables substance use.

Because prescription drugs come from a doctor, they are not addictive.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONS

- [Canadian Mental Health Association \(CMHA\)](#)
- [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#)
- [Health Canada – Substance Use and Addictions Program](#)
- [Drug Free Kids Canada](#)
- [Canadian Association of People Who Use Drugs \(CAPUD\)](#)
- [Moms Stop the Harm | Video](#)
- [Streetworks Needle Exchange](#)
- [Ontario Harm Reduction Network \(OHRN\)](#)
- [Calgary Drop in Centre](#)
- [The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction \(opioid resources\)](#)
- [Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre \(AARC\)](#)
- [Community Based Naloxone Program](#)
- [Opioid Dependency Program](#)
- [Supervised Consumption Services](#)
- [Alberta Health Services: Harm Reduction Services](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Canadian Assembly of Narcotics Anonymous](#)



IMG SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Ogonnaya Amamasi

Ogonnaya Amamasi is an international medical graduate from Nigeria, West Africa. Ogonnaya obtained her medical degree from Ebonyi State University in 2008 and did her post graduate training in Family Medicine at the Federal Medical Center, Owerri. Ogonnaya worked at the same center until October, 2021 when she finally left Nigeria and came to Canada. Three months after landing, she got a job as an Addiction worker with the Wakamow Social Detox Center in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, a subsidiary of Thunder Creek Rehabilitation. Ogonnaya's experiences during her psychiatry rotation working with clients who deal with various types of substance use disorders piqued her interest in pursuing Addictionology.

Skills gained from AIMGA:

AIMGA was one of the 1st groups I joined upon arrival and it played a huge role in my exam preparation and learning about licensure. From AIMGA, I have learnt the meaning of selfless service, support for one another, and the importance of information sharing.

Biggest Lesson Learned & Advice for Other IMGs:

"I had heard so much about the tough hurdles that one needs to surmount to get into practice. One thing I said to myself was that if it's possible for even one person to get in, I was going to be that one person. So I prepared myself mentally to give it my best shot. The work is half done if your mind is ready."

My biggest lesson has been to ignore naysayers, put myself out there and make sure opportunity meets preparedness. In preparing myself, I gathered the relevant information from a few friends who were already ahead of me on a similar licensing journey.

My advice to every IMG would be to prepare oneself, be strategic, remain steadfast and trust your own process.

It's been an insightful and very tasking journey but I'm glad to be here and making headway with my 3 licensing exams successfully completed...the future is bright!

A special thanks goes out to the following international medical graduates: Aisha Ashraf, Oluwadamilola (Dami) Jaiyeola, Eno Chude, Lateefat Hammed Imam, Nadia Arshad, Naima Sultana, Babitha Tharayil, Ogonnaya Amamasi, Mehvish Noreen, Chinyereadaeze (Ada) Chukwu, Ure Kalu Eziyi, and Maria Patria for their additional contributions.

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