

Harm Reduction and Treatment Glossary

Buprenorphine

- An opioid commonly used as medication in opioid agonist treatment.

Consumption and treatment services (CTS)

- The provincial government's name (since 2018) for supervised consumption services. As of [March 31, 2025 the provincial government in Ontario has ordered all CTS sites within 200 metres of a school or daycare to close](#). As an alternative to current or new CTS sites, the province has announced funding for a demonstration project for [19 Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment \(HART\) hubs](#). (See also: supervised consumption services, supervised injection services)

Decriminalization

- The criminalization of drug use is widely seen as a key factor in stigmatizing people who use drugs and is consequently a factor in their decision to not seek health and social services support and resources. Decriminalization in the context of substance use most often relates to legislative changes to statutes that criminalize "simple possession" or, in Canada, possessing a schedule I-III substance (this is contrasted with possession for the purpose of trafficking). The [Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police \(2024\)](#) highlight the need for the province and municipalities to have a robust system of treatment and social services supports available before pursuing formal decriminalization.

Dependence

- In the context of opioids, this generally means physical dependence, in which a person's functionality is dependent on consuming opioids. Heightened tolerance to opioids accompanies dependence. If someone who is physically dependent discontinues opioids or takes a lower dose, they go into *withdrawal*. Dependence is distinct from, but an important aspect of, *opioid use disorder*.

Diacetylmorphine

- Pharmaceutical heroin; can be used as part of injectable opioid agonist treatment.

Dilaudid

- Brand name for hydromorphone.

Fentanyl

- Highly potent opioid. Can be prescribed for pain (e.g. in the form of a dermal patch). The most common street opioid today, though the street supply is generally contaminated with other drugs, e.g. benzodiazepines, stimulants, and other/stronger opioids.

Harm reduction

- A set of practices and services intended to reduce harm while people continue to use drugs. Distinct from treatment. Examples include *needle exchange services* and *supervised consumption services*. With [Ontario's new HART Hub approach](#), neither needle exchanges nor supervised consumption services will be funded.

Heroin

- A semi-synthetic opioid that was the most popular street opioid until the late 1990s/early 2000s, when OxyContin replaced it.

Hydromorphone

- An opioid used in pain treatment, *injectable opioid agonist treatment*, and *safer supply programs*. Can be in oral (pill) or injectable form.

Medically-led Supervised Substance Replacement

- Not to be confused with “safer supply,” medically-led supervised substance replacement is a program advocated by the [Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police \(2024\)](#) that provides substance replacement through the expertise of a physician. This program is meant to be supervised in order to reduce the risk of having replacement substances diverted into the community.

Methadone

- An opioid commonly used as a first-line treatment for *opioid use disorder*.

Methamphetamine

- Methamphetamine is commonly known as “meth” or “speed” (among other names) and is an illegal stimulant in the broader amphetamine family of drugs. Whereas legal amphetamines are used to treat symptoms related to conditions such as obesity or ADHD, methamphetamine is often used for the euphoric feeling it produces. Among the more problematic behaviours sometimes associated with methamphetamine use are paranoia, aggression, and impulsive violence. Methamphetamine is often smoked, but can also be

injected, swallowed, or snorted. For further reading see: [CAMH Mental Illness & Addiction Index](#).

Naloxone

- A medicine used to quickly reverse an overdose. Most commonly used as a nasal spray.

Needle exchange services

- A form of *harm reduction* that allows people to obtain clean and unused hypodermic needles at little or no cost. The [2023 Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for Ontario \(2024\)](#) notes that needle exchanges are an approach developed to reduce the harms associated with the reuse of needles—such as the spread of infectious disease—and calls for an expansion of this program. Ontario’s new plan to address addiction in the province will no longer fund needle exchange services. It should be noted, despite the word “exchange,” these programs do not require a needle to be returned in order for a new one to be provided.

Opioid agonist

- In the context of opioids an agonist is a drug that binds to and activates the brain’s opioid receptors – as opposed to antagonists.

Opioid agonist treatment/therapy (OAT)

- The first-line treatment for moderate to severe *opioid use disorder*. Most commonly consists of *buprenorphine* or *methadone*; also can be *slow-release oral morphine*. These medications are generally taken under supervision, though patients can sometimes get take-home doses provided they meet certain criteria. According to [Iacono et al. \(2023\)](#), between March 2020 and March 2021 in Ontario, only one-third of teens and young adults with a diagnosed opioid use disorder whose deaths were opioid toxicity-related received OAT in the year before their death. This compares to roughly half of adults between the ages of 25 and 44. Furthermore, among all people aged 15 to 44 who died of opioid toxicity-related causes during that same period, more than a quarter had interactions with the healthcare system in the week before their death.

Opioid antagonist

- In the context of opioids an antagonist is a drug that blocks a receptor rather than activating it. Examples include *naloxone* and *naltrexone*.

Opioid use disorder (OUD)

- A substance use disorder characterized by cravings for opioids, continued use despite physical and/or psychological deterioration, increased tolerance with use, and *withdrawal* symptoms after discontinuing opioids. The [Medical Officer of Health for Ontario \(2024\)](#) notes that a third of opioid toxicity deaths in the province are people who have likely NOT been diagnosed with OUD. This compares to data from [Iacono et al. \(2023\)](#) showing that between March 2020 and March 2021, among teens and young adults whose deaths were opioid toxicity-related, only half had an OUD diagnosis.

Oxycontin

- A pharmaceutical opioid that was often prescribed as a pain treatment from the 1990s onwards. Its manufacturer, Purdue, has been sued by many jurisdictions for making false claims about its effectiveness and supposed non-addictiveness, as well as encouraging its massive over-prescription. Was also known as Percocet. Purdue no longer makes it.

People Who Use Drugs (PWUD)

- “People who use drugs” is used as an alternative to other language that tends to stigmatize individuals who use drugs for different reasons and in a variety of settings. This person-centered concept is meant to define a person according to their humanity first (i.e. as “people”), and not according to their drug use.

Safer supply

- Often called safe supply. This term is used very differently from person to person. Health Canada defines it as “providing prescribed medications as a safer alternative to the toxic illegal drug supply to people who are at high risk of overdose.” In Health Canada-funded safer supply programs, the prescribed opioid is usually hydromorphone, which people freely take home and consume wherever (unlike opioid agonist treatment). Safer supply is a form of harm reduction, not treatment.

Simple Possession

- More commonly known as “simple possession,” a charge under [4\(1\) of the Controlled Drugs & Substances Act](#) describes an offense of being in possession of a schedule I-III substance. While simple possession remains a criminal offense in Ontario, in practice, it is decriminalized since recent amendments to both [10.2 \(1\) of the Controlled Drugs & Substances Act \(2022\)](#) and prosecutorial guidance in the [Public Prosecution Service of Canada Deskbook](#) empower police to issue warnings instead of charges in instances of simple possession. (See also: decriminalization)

Slow-release oral morphine

- An opioid commonly used as a first-line treatment for *opioid use disorder*.

Suboxone

- Brand name for a form of *opioid agonist treatment* that consists of a combination of *buprenorphine* and *naloxone*. Administered as a pill or sublingual film. Sublocade is a brand name form of Suboxone that is administered as an injection once a month.

Supervised consumption services (SCS)

- A form of *harm reduction* in which people consume illicit drugs in the presence of a health professional. They may provide sterile needles, as well as treatment referrals, health information, etc. The [Medical Officer of Health for Ontario \(2024\)](#) has advised that such sites in the province are often not equipped to supervise the smoking or inhaling of substances, a pattern of use that their report cites as having led to a third of all opioid toxicity deaths. More recent research by [Iacono et al. \(2023\)](#) suggests that over half of such deaths have been caused by the inhalation of opioids. The [federal government's SCS dashboard](#) indicates there have been no recorded cases of fatal overdose at supervised consumption sites in Canada. (See also: *consumption and treatment services, supervised injection services*)

Supervised injection services

- A term often used interchangeably with *supervised consumption services*, because most SCS sites in Canada allow drugs to be injected but not smoked. (See also: *consumption and treatment services, supervised consumption services*)

Tolerance

- Refers to reduced reaction to a drug following its repeated use. Tolerance can change quite quickly; for example, if someone is incarcerated for a period and unable to use opioids, their tolerance may have decreased during that time, making them especially susceptible to overdose. Similarly, it has been noted by [Iacono et al. \(2023\)](#) that teens and young adults, as well as those who use opioids recreationally, may be similarly susceptible due to a lack of tolerance related to opioids.

Withdrawal

- Symptoms that occur upon abrupt discontinuation or decreased intake of drugs. In the case of opioids this can include anxiety, vomiting, sweating, diarrhea, etc.

Citations and Further Reading

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Kolla, G et al. [Safer Opioid Supply Program Evaluation: A comparison of SOS client outcomes from 2022 and 2023](#). London: London Intercommunity Health Center. September 2023.

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