

Minister Matthews' Statement on OxyContin Abuse

March 12, 2012
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Prescription narcotic addiction has been a growing problem in Ontario. Recent studies have suggested an increase in opioid painkiller addiction as playing a contributing role in hundreds of overdose deaths.

On March 1, 2012, Purdue Pharma stopped distributing the brand name opioid formulation OxyContin into the Canadian market and replaced it with OxyNEO, a tamper-resistant tablet that is more difficult to crush and abuse.

Ontario also decided to restrict access to OxyNEO by funding it through the Exceptional Access Program and the Facilitated Access to Palliative Care Drugs mechanism. This decision balances appropriate use, patient care and the growing problem of opioid addiction in Ontario, and was based on advice from Ontario's Committee to Evaluate Drugs and extensive discussions with pain specialists, addiction experts and other health care providers.

I support these changes as a necessary response to a life-threatening problem. At the same time, Ontario is taking action to help recovering OxyContin users find addiction treatment.

Working with my colleagues Minister Wynne and Minister Hoskins, we are developing a partnership strategy to monitor the impact of prescription narcotic changes and to immediately expand access to addiction services. This strategy includes:

- Partnering with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) to create withdrawal and treatment guidelines to improve outcomes for people addicted to prescription pain medication.
- Working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario to gather information from methadone programs across the province to help identify communities in need of additional resources. Alternative treatment options such as Suboxone are also being made available, where appropriate, for those in need of addictions support.
- Working with ConnexOntario and its Drug and Alcohol helpline to monitor incoming calls regarding opioid addiction and wait lists for addiction treatment services.
- Reaching out to addictions programs through the Ontario Telemedicine Network to improve access to counselling services across the province.
- Closely monitoring emergency departments to identify increased cases of withdrawal.
- Reaching out to the federal government through the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to address issues related to these changes emerging on First Nations Reserves.
- The Expert Working Group on Narcotic Addiction, which includes representation from the Trilateral First Nations Senior Health Officials Committee, is identifying additional short-term initiatives that will support the transition.

As part of Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, we are creating a more coordinated and responsive system to identify problems and intervene early, improving outcomes for those struggling with mental health and addictions.

I will continue to work closely with health care partners and community leaders to ensure a coordinated response for those struggling with prescription narcotics addiction.

LEARN MORE

- The [Drug and Alcohol Helpline](#) (1-800-586-8603) provides information about drug and alcohol addiction services in Ontario.
- For information on addictions and withdrawal, visit [CAMH](#) online.
- Find out more about [Open Minds, Healthy Minds](#) Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy.

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