

A Seat at The Table for Mental Health



The Opioid Epidemic

Recent years have seen a dramatic and tragic increase in opioid addictions and fatal drug overdoses. To reverse the ongoing epidemic, we must stop treating addiction as a moral failing. Instead, we must treat addiction as a chronic disease that deserves the same understanding and compassion as any other type of illness.

Key Facts

- Opioids include heroin and prescription painkillers such as Vicodin, Oxycontin, and Fentanyl.
- Recurrent use of opioids can lead to opioid use disorder (OUD), a chronic brain disease that includes dysfunction of the brain reward system, motivation, memory and related circuitry.ⁱ
- Addiction worsens as substance use continues and changes brain function dramatically, inhibiting a person's ability to control their substance use.ⁱⁱ
- While prescription opioids have legitimate medical uses to ease pain, these medications are addictive and should not be used without a prescription or for longer than necessary.
- More than 10 million Americans used prescription opioids for nonmedical reasons in 2014.ⁱⁱⁱ
- 115 Americans die from an opioid overdose each day.^{iv}
- Illinois opioid overdose deaths increased 89% from 2013 and 2017 – from 1,072 to 2,022.^v
- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT), which combines psychosocial therapy and FDA-approved medication, is an effective treatment for opioid use disorder that.^{vi}

Possible Questions for Discussion

- Has addiction to prescription opioids or heroin affected your family or community?
- What are the barriers to treatment of substance use disorders?
- How are mental health and addiction connected?
- How can families affected by addiction get the support they need?

What You Can Do to Help Prevent and Treat Addiction

Recognize Some of the Signs and Symptoms of Opioid Addiction^{vii}

- Social withdrawal and isolation; worsening performance in work or school; sudden financial problems
- Confusion, slowed breathing, or constricted pupils; elation or euphoria followed by marked sedation or drowsiness; getting multiple prescriptions from different doctors for opioids
- Flu-like symptoms caused by withdrawal

Help A Friend or Loved One With a Substance Use Disorder Get Help^{viii}

- If friend or loved one has asked for help, you can take steps to help them locate a health care professional and provide that information to your friend.
- Tell your friend or loved one that it takes courage to ask for help and that, like with other chronic diseases, treatment options exist.
- There is no evidence that confrontational “interventions” work. Instead, encourage your friend to see a doctor and consider exploring treatment centers for your friend.

Be Responsible with Prescription Opioids

- If you are experiencing pain or taking pain medications, talk to your health care provider about medication dosage, duration, and alternative pain management techniques.^{ix}
- Never give or sell prescription opioids prescribed to you to someone else.
- Dispose properly of unused prescription opioids by finding a drug take-back program.

Advocate to Increase Access to Treatment

- Talk to others about how addiction is *not* a moral failing, but an illness that must be treated.
- Take The Pledge to support Medication-Assisted Treatment at <https://www.opioidrecovery.org/take-action>.
- Know your rights under parity laws that require most insurers who offer mental health and addiction coverage to do so on an equal basis with other types of medical conditions.
- If you or a loved one is denied treatment by a health insurer, appeal and consider registering a complaint at www.ParityRegistry.org.

About The Kennedy Forum

Just as President Kennedy rallied the nation to dream big and set audacious goals 50 years ago, The Kennedy Forum in Illinois is working toward lasting change in the way mental health and addictions are considered and treated. Our mission is to end stigma against mental health and substance use disorders in both attitudes and practice. We believe that strong, bold leadership, strategic collaboration with partners and concerted action, it is possible to build a future with a health system that fully recognizes that the brain is part of the body and all persons are treated with dignity. Join us at www.thekennedyforumillinois.org

RESOURCES

- American Society of Addiction Medicine: <http://www.asam.org/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>
- SAMHSA, Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Opioid Overdose: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/index.html>
- Pew Charitable Trusts, Background on Medication-Assisted Treatment: <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2016/11/medication-assisted-treatment-improves-outcomes-for-patients-with-opioid-use-disorder>
- Faces & Voices of Recovery: <http://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/>

ⁱ Pew Charitable Trusts, Medication-Assisted Treatment Improves Outcomes for Patients with Opioid Use Disorder, <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2016/11/medication-assisted-treatment-improves-outcomes-for-patients-with-opioid-use-disorder>.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Surgeon General, Key Findings: The Neurobiology of Substance Use, Misuse, and Addiction, <https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/key-findings/neurobiology>.

ⁱⁱⁱ SAMHSA, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2014, <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/NSDUH-FRR1-2014/NSDUH-FRR1-2014.pdf>.

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/epidemic/>.

^v Illinois Department of Public Health, Drug Overdose Deaths, <http://www.dph.illinois.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Drug-Overdose-Deaths-March-2018.pdf>.

^{vi} Pew Charitable Trusts.

^{vii} DrugAbuse.com, <http://drugabuse.com/library/opiate-abuse/>.

^{viii} National Institute on Drug Abuse, What to Do If Your Adult Friend or Loved One Has a Problem with Drugs, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-adult-friend-or-loved-one-has-problem-drugs>.

^{ix} U.S. Surgeon General, Opioids, <https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/priorities/opioids/index.html>.