



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Opioid Recovery Program



www.nshealth.ca

Opioid Recovery Program

Welcome to the Opioid Recovery Program (ORP)

- Reaching out for help takes courage. Whether you are just starting to think about change, or you are ready to take the next step, you are in the right place. **You are not alone.**
- This pamphlet has information for you and/or your support person(s) about ORP.
- If you or your support person(s) have any questions, please call an ORP clinic in your area.
 - › Phone: _____

Understanding Opioid Use Disorder (OUD)

- Over time, opioids change how your brain works. These changes are not a sign of weakness or a flaw in character.
- These changes can lead to:
 - › Cravings
 - › Withdrawal symptoms
 - › Problems stopping or lowering opioid use
- It will take time for your brain to go back to how it was before using opioids.

What is ORP?

ORP is a program that helps people reach their goals for opioid use. It is:

- **Person-centered:** Our goal is to meet each person's needs.
- **Voluntary:** You choose whether to attend.
- Based on a **harm reduction approach:** This means we focus on:
 - › Safety
 - › Lowering your risks
 - › Supporting you in making changes at your own pace
- ORP clinics are available across Nova Scotia.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

What to expect at ORP

The ORP team has training in substance use and recovery. When you connect with ORP:

- You will be treated with respect
- We will keep your information confidential (private)
- You may be prescribed a medication called an **opioid agonist treatment (OAT)**, like:
 - › Methadone
 - › Buprenorphine and naloxone (Suboxone®) or buprenorphine (Sublocade®)
 - › Slow-release oral (taken by mouth) morphine (Kadian®)
- These medications will help to:
 - › Lower cravings
 - › Treat and prevent withdrawal symptoms
 - › Lower harm from substance use
 - › Improve your overall health
- Your treatment will also include:
 - › Supportive counselling
 - › Connection with other Mental Health and Addictions programs and community resources (like housing, income assistance, and social services), as needed

- The members of your health care team may include:
 - › Doctor
 - › Nurse practitioner (NP)
 - › Nurse
 - › Social worker
 - › Community pharmacist
 - › Administrative staff
 - › Others, as needed

We are all here to support you. If you have questions, please ask any member of your health care team.

Harm reduction and safety

Harm reduction means we try to reduce (lower) the risks of opioid use (like infection, overdose/poisoning/medical emergency, or death). This may include:

- Learning how to be as safe as possible while using opioids
- Access to sterile (clean) equipment (like cookers, needles, alcohol swabs)
- Access to vaccines for preventable illnesses (like hepatitis B)
- Tests for infections (like HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C)
- Referrals to other health care services, if needed

- Access to a naloxone kit
 - › **Naloxone** is a medication that temporarily (for a short time) reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and gives time for medical help to arrive. It is available as an injection (into a muscle) using a needle and as a nasal (nose) spray.

Anyone who takes opioids should have a naloxone kit for friends or family to use in an emergency. Make sure to tell your support person(s) where your naloxone kit is.

- › A naloxone kit lets you help someone else who is having an opioid use medical emergency (like an overdose or poisoning).
- › Free training and/or replacement kits are available.

What should I expect on my first day?

- You will meet with a team member to talk about your needs. Together you will decide if the program is right for you.
- You will learn more about the program, including:
 - › What supports are offered
 - › How to make goals for your recovery and start working on them
 - › What each ORP team member does and how they work together to support your goals
 - › Other general information (like when and where services are offered, how to book appointments, where to park)
- We use **urine (pee) drug screening (UDS)** to support open communication, treatment planning, and safe prescribing decisions. You will be asked to give a urine sample at most clinic appointments, including on your first day.

Appointments

- When you start the program, you will likely come to the clinic at least once a week for the first 30 days (1 month). Then you will come less often. Your team will work with you to decide how often you should come. This will depend on things like your safety risks, goals, and your work or school schedule.
- To help keep you safe, the team will do regular monitoring (like UDS and checking your OAT medication). This may be done at regular clinic appointments and randomly 4 to 6 times a year (depending on the OAT medication you are taking).
- We will send appointment reminders by phone or text message (if you agree to using text messages).
- If you need help getting to your appointments, talk with your health care team.
- You are also welcome to call the clinic at any time.

How will ORP help me?

- The ORP team will help you:
 - › Learn about safer opioid use
 - › Have access to safe and effective OAT medication
 - › Get support to work towards your goals
 - › Get help connecting with community services, as needed
 - › Improve your quality of health

Things to think about when taking part in ORP:

- You may be prescribed medication(s) as part of your treatment. All medications have risks, including possible serious side effects. The ORP team will go over these risks and side effects with you.
- **When starting OAT medication, the risk of overdose and/or poisoning is highest during the first 14 days (2 weeks) of treatment.**
 - › **It is important to always take your medication as prescribed and at the same time each day.**
 - › Stopping OAT medication suddenly can lead to withdrawal symptoms and loss of tolerance. **If you miss more than 1 dose of your OAT medication, you may start to have withdrawal symptoms.**

- OAT medication must be stored in a secure place out of the reach of other people and pets.

Even a small amount of OAT medication taken by a person it is not prescribed to, especially a child, could cause an overdose, poisoning, or death.



- Each OAT medication has a different way of interacting with other substances. **For your safety, it is important to talk with your ORP health care team about any substance use,** including alcohol, prescription medications, and over-the-counter products.
- **The team will never judge you.** Open conversations help to keep you, your loved ones, and your community safe.

What are the possible side effects of OAT medication?

- Like all opioids, OAT medication can cause:
 - › Sweating
 - › Dry mouth (which can raise your risk of tooth decay)
 - › Headache
 - › Itchiness
 - › Constipation (not being able to poop)
 - › Weight gain
 - › Lower sex drive
 - › Trouble getting an erection (if you have a penis)
 - › Irregular menstrual cycles (periods)
- If you have any of these symptoms, talk to a member of your ORP health care team.

How long will I need to take OAT medication?

- This is different for each person.
 - › Using opioids changes the brain. It can take time for the brain to recover.
 - › You may also need time to deal with what caused you to use opioids (like trauma, stress, or long-term pain).
- OAT medication is not a cure for OUD. It is a long-term treatment. Research shows that the longer a person stays in treatment, the better they will do. You and your ORP health care team will decide together how long you need to take OAT medication, based on what supports your health and safety.
- If your OAT medication is not working for you, talk to your OAT health care team about switching to another OAT medication.

Do not stop taking your OAT medication before talking to your ORP health care team. They can help you safely taper off (slowly lower your medication dose over time until you stop taking it) your OAT medication.

Having a support person(s)

- A support person is someone you feel safe with and comfortable talking openly around. With your consent (permission), your support person(s) may:
 - › Come to appointments with you
 - › Help explain your questions or concerns to your ORP health care team
 - › Be involved in your care planning, at a level you are comfortable with
 - › Learn how to give you supportive care without judgment
 - › Offer encouragement
 - › Help you get to and from the clinic

Information for loved ones

- Myths (ideas or stories that are not true) and wrong information about substance use often prevent people from getting treatment.
- We encourage you to learn about OUD and OAT. We can help you find information and resources to help you support your loved one and make your relationship healthier.

Things for your loved ones to think about:

- Opioid use can become a disorder when the person feels strong cravings and/or they feel they cannot stop using opioids.
- The treatment process is different for each person.
- Your loved one may be using a substance during treatment. This **does not** mean they have failed.
- OAT medication **does not** simply replace one drug with another:
 - › OAT medication helps to lower withdrawal symptoms and/or cravings.
 - › OAT is a safe and stable medication that is managed by a health care team. Non-prescription opioids are **not** stable, which raises the risk of overdose.
 - › OAT medication offers people the chance to heal and take control of their life.

Who can I call for more support?

Nova Scotia Peer Support Phone Service

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-307-1686
- Hours:
 - › 5 to 11 p.m., Wednesday to Friday
 - › 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays
 - › Closed, Mondays and Tuesdays

Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167
- Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

How can I give feedback?

When you tell us about your experience, good or bad, it helps us improve our care and service.

Ways to provide feedback:

- Share directly with your ORP health care team.
- Call the **Patient Relations** team:
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-844-884-4177
 - › www.nshealth.ca/contact-us/patient-feedback

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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Learn more:
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