

# Narcotics Strategy

Ontario's plan to reduce the misuse and abuse of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances

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# Narcotics Strategy: Background

- Inappropriate use and abuse of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances is a serious public health and safety issue in Canada, the United States and elsewhere in the world
- Issues include: excessive prescribing, escalating misuse, escalating diversion away from intended medical purposes, increases in addictions, increases in narcotics-related deaths
- Ontario is launching a Narcotics Strategy to address misuse of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances, and to ensure their safe and appropriate use by patients with medical needs

# What are narcotics and other controlled substances?

- Narcotics and other controlled substances are defined by Health Canada under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act

## ***Prescription Narcotics***

- Opioids, referred to as narcotics, are used to treat moderate to severe pain
- Examples of opioids: oxycodone (OxyContin, Percocet), morphine (MSContin), fentanyl (Duragesic) and codeine (Tylenol #3)

## ***Other Controlled Substances***

- Non-narcotic examples of controlled substances include stimulants such as methylphenidate (Ritalin), benzodiazepines (Valium) and barbiturates (phenobarbital)

# Narcotics Strategy: The need for action

- Since 1991, prescriptions for oxycodone-containing products rose by 900% in Ontario.
- Ontario has the highest rate of narcotics use in Canada.
- Since 2004, the number of oxycodone-related deaths in Ontario has nearly doubled.
- Narcotics abuse-related admissions to publicly funded treatment and addiction services in Ontario doubled from 2004-08.
- The ministry spent \$156 million on narcotics for over 600,000 Ontario Drug Benefit Program recipients in 2009-10, for 3.9 million prescriptions. This equates to over six prescriptions per person, and an annual cost of \$260 per person.
- A number of First Nations communities have declared a state of emergency over the abuse of prescription narcotics, particularly oxycodone-containing drugs.

## Narcotics Strategy: First key element

- Proposed legislation to be introduced this fall that would, if passed, allow for a new database containing information on all prescription narcotics and other controlled substances dispensed in Ontario. It's a big expansion on the database currently used by the ministry for the Ontario Drug Benefit Program.
- The database would be used to:
  - ▶ Collect, monitor and analyze information related to prescription narcotics and other controlled substances
  - ▶ Identify patterns of inappropriate or excessive prescribing or dispensing
  - ▶ Implement a province-wide system of alerts when attempts to visit multiple prescribers, or visit multiple pharmacies, are detected
  - ▶ In instances of inappropriate activity, responses could include educational support and resources, reporting to the appropriate regulatory college and, in extreme circumstances, law enforcement.

## Narcotics Strategy: Second key element

- Partner with the health care sector to raise awareness about appropriate prescribing practices, including:
  - ▶ Working with the medical regulatory colleges to develop educational and training initiatives on pain management and appropriate prescribing practices
  - ▶ Raising awareness with health care providers of prescribing and pain management guidelines, including the Canadian Guideline for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain (released in May 2010 by the National Opioid Use Guideline Group, comprised of regulatory bodies for physicians from across Canada).

## Narcotics Strategy: Third key element

- Partner with the health care sector to raise awareness about appropriate dispensing practices, including:
  - ▶ Working with the pharmacy regulatory colleges to develop educational and training initiatives on appropriate dispensing practices
  - ▶ Continuing regular inspections of pharmacies that dispense a high rate of narcotics
  - ▶ Supporting a program for the safe disposal of pain medications to ensure their proper disposal, and reduce the diversion of narcotics for inappropriate uses.

## Narcotics Strategy: Fourth key element

- Patient education to address excessive use and misuse of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances, including:
  - ▶ Launching initiatives to educate patients about safe and appropriate use of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances
  - ▶ Raising awareness – especially among young people – about the risks associated with misuse of prescription narcotics, which include:
    - the highly addictive properties of some narcotics, and
    - the risks of using prescription narcotics or other controlled substances that are not prescribed by a physician or are used for purposes other than intended medical purposes.

# Narcotics Strategy: Fifth key element

## **Addictions Treatment**

- Ontario's Narcotics Strategy will:
  - ▶ Focus on treating patients with addiction
  - ▶ Investigate more options for treating and supporting those addicted to prescription narcotics and other controlled substances
  - ▶ Develop educational workshops on the treatment of narcotic dependence.

# Narcotics Strategy: Protecting Ontarians Privacy

- Protecting the privacy rights of citizens is of the utmost importance to the Government of Ontario.
- The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has consulted extensively with the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario on protection-of-privacy issues related to the proposed narcotics database. The ministry will continue to work with the privacy commissioner's office to ensure safeguards are in place that provide the maximum privacy protections for personal health information.
- The ministry will do the utmost to protect the security of the data collected within the proposed narcotics database. There will be security mechanisms restricting access to prescription monitoring data and protecting the privacy of patients, prescribers and pharmacists.

# Benefits of Ontario's Narcotics Strategy

The strategy will:

- Save lives and protect individuals and families from the harmful impacts that can come from misuse, abuse and addiction of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances.
- Ensure those with legitimate medical needs get the medications they require.
- Raise both health care provider and public awareness about:
  - ▶ the safe and appropriate use of narcotics and other controlled substances, and
  - ▶ the risks associated with using these medications when not prescribed by a prescriber for intended medical purposes.
- The strategy supports Ontario's Excellent Care for All Act and its focus on improving the quality and value of health care practices across the system.

## For more information on Ontario's Narcotics Strategy, visit

- English:  
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/narcoticsstrategy>
- French:  
<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/strategiestupefiants>
- To obtain a copy of the *Canadian Guideline for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-cancer Pain*, visit the Michael G. DeGroote National Pain Centre website:

<http://nationalpaincentre.mcmaster.ca/opioid/>

For more information about the National Opioid Use Guideline Group (NOUGG), visit the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario's website:

[www.cpso.on.ca/members/resources/](http://www.cpso.on.ca/members/resources/)