

A Trickster Tale –

Outsmarting Opioids Through
Education and Action



Tribal Opioid RESPONSE

Healing our Nations Together



NPAIHB

Indian Leadership for Indian Health

Introduction

Opioid misuse is a health issue that impacts many people. It is not a moral failing or weakness. Nor is it a mark of bad character. It can happen to anyone.

People with **substance use disorder**, including **opioid use disorder** are often surprised by the cunning ways drugs or alcohol crept into their lives and became an issue. The reason for this is simple- addictive substances (like **opioids** and alcohol) actually change the way our brain works. In fact, one of the first brain changes that occurs is that opioids hijack the part of our brain that controls our cravings, tricking us into wanting opioids more frequently and in larger amounts.

Blaming ourselves or our loved ones for addiction is not useful. For many people, recovering from this condition requires help from a health care provider, counseling, and medications. Judgement and unkindness only stands in the way of those who are struggling. But kindness and community support opens doors and save lives.

We can look to stories of Trickster to think about how opioid misuse can similarly sneak into our communities and result in opioid use disorders for our people.



Definitions:

- **Opioids** are drugs that block pain signals from reaching our brain. They can also change our mental state, making us feel happy, relaxed, sleepy, or confused.
- **Opioid misuse** is when someone uses an opioid pain medicine (like oxycodone and morphine) for a reason it was not intended for or in a way that was not prescribed.
- **Opioid use disorder** is a chronic health condition that people can recover from. It occurs when opioid misuse causes health issues or problems at work, school, or home.



Lessons from Trickster

In many Tribal oral traditions Trickster is a sacred, yet crafty being who manipulates and cheats others. He is described as an old man or coyote among some, a raven among others. He is called Wajdjunkaga among the Winnebago and Manabozho among the Menominee.

Often we share stories of Trickster to teach life lessons, like the importance of being humble, living in balance with nature, and respecting our medicines.

We can learn a great deal about opioid misuse by thinking about this topic in relation to Trickster. For example, it is common for people to misuse medicines that were intended to cure and heal. Without realizing it our substance *use* (to treat a health condition) can transform into **substance misuse** (which negatively impacts our life). We can imagine that there is a Trickster spirit guiding this transformation of medicine from a helpful healing tool to a harmful burden.

- **Substance use disorder** is a chronic health condition that people can recover from. It occurs when substance misuse causes health issues or problems at work, school, or home.
- **Substance misuse** is when someone uses a substance (like painkillers, alcohol, meth, or cocaine) for a reason it was not intended for or in a way that was not prescribed.

Fortunately, Trickster does not only cheat and manipulate others, he also helps teach important lessons.

In the case of opioid misuse these lessons are:

- All medicines, whether they are provided by a healer, medicine man, mother nature, or a doctor, contain a powerful spirit, as well as a prescription for good use
- Rather than blaming our relatives with an opioid use disorder, we must support them in getting the help they need and walk the road to recovery with them
- All medicines contain both the power to harm and the power to heal
- Because medicines are powerful and some substances alter our ability to control how and when we use them, it is important to remember that substance misuse, including opioid misuse, can happen to anyone



Definition:

- **Opioid overdose** occurs when the amount of opioids taken slows or stops our breathing. There is a medicine called naloxone that can reverse an opioid overdose.



What this mean for Tribal Communities



We know that our experiences are closely tied to those of our relatives and relations. This holds true when it comes to opioids.

Through the 1990s until 2011, the use of opioid medications tripled across the United States. For many Tribal communities, this brought an increase in opioid misuse, opioid use disorders, **opioid overdose**, and death.

Once the negative consequences of prescription opioids became apparent, many Tribal health care providers decreased the amount of opioids they offered. However, this did little for our relatives already addicted to opioids. Because prescribed opioids were now more difficult to get, some of our relatives sought out more dangerous drugs, like heroin. This caused the opioid epidemic to grow. It also led to another cycle of overdoses and deaths.



Opioid misuse has caused enough suffering in our communities, and we are ready for a change. Fortunately, there is more hope than ever. We can heal our communities through educating ourselves and others about opioids, seeking help when we need it, and supporting others who are struggling. There are life saving drugs that can reverse an opioid overdose, and there are others that can help those who are in recovery.

This booklet is intended to help you learn basic information about opioids, so you can keep yourself and those you love safe and healthy. It is also a tool we hope you will use to inspire action for positive change in your community.



Opioids 101

What are Opioids?

Opioid drugs block pain signals from reaching our brain. They can also change our mental state, making us feel happy, relaxed, sleepy, or confused. Health care providers commonly prescribe opioid medications to help people manage pain, whether their pain is from something like surgery or a long-term medical condition, like cancer.

Opioids prescribed by healthcare providers include:

- Morphine
- Codeine
- Buprenorphine
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin)
- Oxycodone (OxyContin and Percocet)
- Fentanyl

Some opioid drugs, like heroin, are illegal and are not used to treat medical conditions.



How does opioid addiction happen?

Some people develop opioid addiction by taking illegal opioids (like heroin). Others develop an addiction through misusing prescription opioids from a health care provider.

Because medicines are powerful and opioids can quickly alter our ability to control how and when we use them, without realizing it we may start to misuse our medicines by taking them:

- more often
- in larger amounts
- in different ways than we were directed to use them

Signs Someone May Have an Opioid Use Disorder

Below is a list of common signs you (or someone you know) may have an opioid use disorder.

- Taking opioids in larger doses than prescribed
- Taking opioids for longer amounts of time than intended
- Inability to control use or quit
- Experiencing cravings
- Inability to fulfill normal work, home, or school responsibilities
- Withdrawing from social, work, or other activities

- Taking risks that could result in physical or emotional harm
- Spending excessive time trying to get, use, or recover from opioids
- Needing more opioids to experience the same effects as before
- Experiencing **withdrawal symptoms** when opioid wears off



Definition:

- **Opioid withdrawal symptoms** include diarrhea, sweating, nervousness, shaking, and moodiness that can occur when opioids wear off.

Opioid Overdose

What is an opioid overdose?

An opioid overdose occurs when the amount of opioids taken slows or stops our breathing. If an overdose is not treated, it may result in death. An overdose can be caused by both illegal opioids or prescription opioid medications.

Signs of an overdose include:



Pale skin



Unresponsiveness



Bluish fingernails or lips



Vomiting or gurgling noises



Slow or no breathing



Small pupils



Inability to speak

Who is at risk for an opioid overdose?

An overdose can happen to anyone taking opioids, but some things increase your risk of overdosing.

Factors that increase your risk of overdosing include:

- Changing how you take your opioid, for example, by increasing the amount you use or increasing how often you take it
- Starting to take opioids again after a period of no use or decreased use
- Buying your opioid from a new or unfamiliar source
- Allowing someone else to prepare your dose for you
- Combining opioids with other drugs and/or alcohol
- If you have overdosed in the past

If You Think Someone Is Having an Opioid Overdose

STEP ONE: Call 9-1-1

STEP TWO: Give the person **naloxone**, if it's available

STEP THREE: If needed, provide rescue breaths or CPR

STEP FOUR: Lay the person on their side to prevent choking

STEP FIVE: Stay with the person until emergency workers arrive



Definition:

- **Naloxone** is a safe medication that can quickly reverse an opioid overdose. It can be injected into the muscle or sprayed into the nose of a person who is overdosing.

Using Naloxone Nasal Spray to Reverse an Opioid Overdose

Naloxone is a safe medicine that can save the life of a person who is overdosing on opioids. In an opioid overdose emergency, acting quickly is important. Naloxone nasal (nose) spray can be used before emergency medical professionals come.

STEP ONE: Peel back the package. Remove the nose spray. Hold the spray with your thumb on the plunger and two fingers on the nozzle.



STEP TWO: Place the tip of the nozzle in either nostril until your fingers touch the bottom of the person's nose.



STEP THREE: Press the plunger down firmly to release the medicine into the person's nose.



If breathing does not return to normal after 2-3 minutes give an additional dose of naloxone nasalspray using a new device in the other nostril.

Important: If you suspect the individual has taken fentanyl, or another drug that may be cut with fentanyl (like heroin), *more* naloxone is needed to reverse the overdose. Experts recommend using **2-3 naloxone nasal sprays without waiting between doses. Because fentanyl is so common, some experts recommend using 2-3 naloxone nasal sprays without waiting between doses for anyone who might be overdosing on opioids.** After receiving 2-3 naloxone nasal sprays, an individual who is overdosing on opioids is likely to start breathing and become responsive.

STEP FOUR: If the individual does not have a pulse and is not breathing, start CPR.

If the individual is breathing, make sure to lay them on their side to prevent choking (in case they vomit).

STEP FIVE: Wait for emergency responders. If you forgot to call 911 before administering naloxone, call now, even if the person wakes up. Why? After 30-90 minutes naloxone may wear off, and the person may start to overdose again.

If help takes longer than expected and the individual becomes unresponsive and stops breathing again, another dose of naloxone may be required.

Keep in mind

Naloxone nasal spray may result in withdrawal symptoms, like body aches, fever, runny nose, sweating, nervousness, and vomiting. These symptoms are not life threatening, and they will be managed by emergency responders.

Different ways of giving naloxone

Instead of naloxone nasal spray, a naloxone injection (shot) can also be used to reverse an opioid overdose. For information about using the naloxone injection visit www.npaihb.org/opioids.

To Get A Naloxone Kit

In 2017, over 47,000 people died from an opioid overdose. Many of these deaths could have been prevented. Friends, family, and other relations can save lives with naloxone.

To get a naloxone nasal spray kit (or a naloxone shot kit) contact your local Tribal clinic, IHS facility, or visit your local pharmacy.

If you have trouble accessing a kit, contact naloxone@npaihb.org or 503-228-4185.



Getting Help for an Opioid Use Disorder

Many people struggle with opioid misuse and opioid use disorder. If you are worried you might have a problem, you are not alone. The first step is setting up an appointment at your local clinic or IHS facility, because the only person who can diagnose you is a health care provider.

What kinds of treatment options are there for someone with opioid use disorder?

There are many types of treatment that can be effective.

Speaking with a behavioral health counselor can help you change behaviors related to opioid use. They may also recommend participating in cultural activities and seeking guidance from a traditional healer to help you walk the road to recovery.

Taking certain medications, like methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone, may help you recover as well. Research shows that taking medications *and* seeing a behavioral health counselor at the same time is often more successful than either treatment alone.

How do medications help with treatment?

Methadone and buprenorphine work on the same parts of the brain as other opioids, but they do not make you feel high. They help restore balance to your brain, and allow it to heal while you work on sticking to your treatment plan. Fortunately these medicines are safe to take for months, years, or even a lifetime.

Naltrexone works by blocking a high you normally get from taking opioids. It doesn't help with withdrawal symptoms or cravings, but it is a tool many use to prevent them from relapsing.

Medication Myths

There are many misunderstandings about medications that help with opioid treatment. It's understandable. After all we know that medications have both the power to harm and heal, and for many people with opioid use disorder, opioids crept into their lives and became an issue before they even realized what was happening. That being said, medicines, like methadone and buprenorphine, are safe, effective, and have helped thousands of people recover. You and your doctor can decide together if they are right for you.

Below are common myths (and the truth) about medicines that can be used to treat opioid use disorder.

Myth: *Methadone and buprenorphine get you high. Taking them is just trading one addiction for another.*



The truth: Methadone and buprenorphine are opioids. In people who don't regularly take opioids, they can produce a high. But the same is not true for people who have opioid use disorder. At the doses prescribed, these medications do not produce a high. Rather they decrease your withdrawal symptoms and cravings, which can make it possible to function normally, attend school or work, and participate in other treatments to help heal from substance use disorder.



Myth: *You only should take methadone and buprenorphine for a few weeks.*



The truth: This is a decision that should be made between a doctor and a patient. For some it can take months or years for the brain to heal and for them to make the needed life changes to decrease their risk of relapsing. Fortunately, methadone and buprenorphine are both safe to take for a lifetime if needed.

Supporting Someone with an Opioid Use Disorder

Recovering from an opioid use disorder can be a life long journey. Rather than blaming our loved ones with this health condition, we must support them in getting the help they need. Walking the road to recovery can be a bumpy path with many ups and downs, but having a strong support system can help. The following are ideas for how you can support someone with an opioid use disorder.



Tips for supporting someone with an opioid use disorder:

Remember opioid use disorder is not a choice or a moral failing. It is a disease of the brain.

Learn about opioid use disorder. Reading this booklet is a good start!

Talk to a counselor or another medical professional.

Use kind and respectful language.

Keep in mind not everyone is able to recognize how much opioid use is impacting their life, so be gentle and share how you see opioids impacting them.

Stay positive encourage your loved one to get help...but try to not focus too much on detox and rehab.

Keep in mind some people are not ready to stop using opioids completely. Helping someone use strategies to protect their safety while they continue to use opioids may be where they are at now.

Make sure to invite the person to join in on activities, just like you would anyone else. *Feeling supported and loved is good medicine.*

Recognize that relapse is not a sign of failure. It is often part of the overall recovery process.

Get training on using naloxone - a safe drug that you can use to quickly reverse an opioid overdose.

Carry naloxone in case of an opioid overdose emergency. Acting quickly is important. To get a naloxone nasal spray kit (or a naloxone shot kit) contact your local Tribal clinic, IHS facility, or visit your local pharmacy. If you have trouble accessing a kit, contact naloxone@npaihb.org or 503-228-4185.



Definition:

- **Kind and respectful language** includes using what is called person-first language to describe people with opioid use disorder. For example, saying "people who use drugs," instead of saying "drug users." Also try to avoid using stigmatizing language like "drug addict," "clean," or other terms that reduce a person to just one behavior.

What Can We Do As a Community?

Opioids contain a powerful spirit. They have both the power to manage pain and provide comfort, as well as the power to do harm through fostering addiction. Our cultural traditions, including our Trickster stories, can teach us important lessons and assist us in healing our communities.

The following are ways Tribal communities can help prevent opioid misuse and support those already impacted:

- Embrace culture as medicine and encourage those with opioid use disorder to participate in traditional healing and cultural practices
- Advocate to increase training and availability of naloxone for your emergency first responders, police officers, Tribal staff, community service providers, and every community member
- Support our relatives with opioid use disorder in getting the judgement-free help they need
- Advocate to increase access to medications, like methadone and buprenorphine, that help reduce cravings
- Use a medication lockbox and encourage those in your community to purchase them as well
- Learn where there are safe prescription disposal sites and deposit all unused medications there
- Share the information contained in this booklet
- Speak up and take action where you can make positive change

We have lost too many relatives and relations to the opioid epidemic. Fortunately, with safe and effective treatments for recovery, there is more hope than ever. Through education and community action we can tell the tale of Trickster to outsmart opioids, prevent addiction, and support the ones already impacted.

To Learn More

Text 'OPIOIDS' to 97779 to receive free videos, quizzes, fun facts, and more to grow your knowledge and be an effective advocate for your community.

Visit the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board's website at www.npaihb.org/opioid for information, fact sheets, videos, and posters about opioids.

Additional Resources

- www.ihs.gov/opioids
- www.samhsa.gov/medication-assisted-treatment/treatment#medications-used-in-mat
- www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids







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