

# Opioid prescribing for Chronic Pain

Quality Standards

Health Quality Ontario, the provincial advisor on the quality of health care, has released a quality standard offering guidance on prescribing opioids to treat people with chronic pain.

## Below is a summary of the quality standard:

### 1. Comprehensive Assessment

People with chronic pain receive a comprehensive assessment, including consideration of their functional status and social determinants of health.

### 2. Setting Goals for Pain Management and Function

People with chronic pain set goals for pain management and functional improvement in partnership with their health care professionals. These goals are evaluated regularly.

### 3. First-Line Treatment With Non-opioid Therapies

People with chronic pain receive an individualized and multidisciplinary approach to their care. They are offered non-opioid pharmacotherapy and nonpharmacological therapies as first-line treatment.

### 4. Shared Decision-Making and Information on the Potential Benefits and Harms of Opioids for Chronic Pain

People with chronic pain, and their families and caregivers, receive information about the potential benefits and harms of opioid therapy for chronic pain at the time of both prescribing and dispensing so that they can participate in shared decision-making.

### 5. Initiating a Trial of Opioids for Chronic Pain

People with chronic pain begin a trial of opioid therapy only after other multimodal therapies have been tried without adequate improvement in pain and function, and they either have no contraindications to opioid therapy or have discussed any relative contraindications with their health care professional. If opioids are initiated, the trial starts at the lowest effective dose, preferably below 50 mg morphine equivalents per day. Titrating over time to a dose of less than

90 mg morphine equivalents per day may be warranted in selected cases in which people are willing to accept a higher risk of harm for improved pain relief.

### 6. Co-prescribing Opioids and Benzodiazepines

People with chronic pain are not prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time whenever possible.

### 7. Opioid Use Disorder

People prescribed opioids for chronic pain who are subsequently diagnosed with opioid use disorder have access to opioid agonist therapy.

### 8. Prescription Monitoring Systems

Health care professionals who prescribe or dispense opioids have access to a real-time prescription monitoring system at the point of care. Prescription history is checked when opioids are prescribed and dispensed and every 3 to 6 months during long-term use, or more frequently if there are concerns regarding duplicate prescriptions, potentially harmful medication interactions, or diversion.

### 9. Tapering and Discontinuation

All people with chronic pain on long-term opioid therapy, especially those taking 90 mg morphine equivalents or more per day, are periodically offered a trial of tapering to a lower dose or tapering to discontinuation.

### 10. Health Care Professional Education

Health care professionals have the knowledge and skills to appropriately assess and treat chronic pain using a multidisciplinary, multimodal approach; appropriately prescribe, monitor, taper, and discontinue opioids; and recognize and treat opioid use disorder.

To see the complete quality standard and accompanying guide for patients, visit:

**[HQOntario.ca/OpioidPrescribingChronic](https://www.hqontario.ca/OpioidPrescribingChronic)**

## What are quality standards?

Quality standards outline what high-quality care looks like for conditions and topics where there are large variations in how care is delivered, or gaps between the care provided and the care patients should receive. They are based on the best available evidence and are created in partnership with patients and health care professionals.

They are intended to:

- Help patients know what to ask for in their care
- Help health care professionals know what care they should be offering

- Help organizations improve the quality of care they provide
- Help health system planners make decisions regionally and system-wide that support the implementation of evidence-based health care

## How are quality standards different from other standards and guidelines?

Quality standards are concise statements designed to help health professionals easily and quickly know what care to provide, based on the best available evidence. They include a patient guide to help patients, their families and informal caregivers know what to discuss about their care with their health care professionals.

**Health Quality Ontario**

Let's make our health system healthier

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