

## **Ontario College of Pharmacists: *Strategy to Address Opioid Use Disorder Ontario***

Ontario is facing a serious public health and safety issue related to opioid use, including prescription narcotics and other controlled substances. Opioid use disorder is the third leading cause of accidental death in Ontario and opioid-related causes of death continue to increase each year. A comprehensive strategy, that considers the complexity of both health and social factors related to opioid use disorder, is needed to address this challenging issue.

Pharmacy professionals play an important role in the procurement and distribution of narcotic and controlled substances for use in patient care and therefore have a professional responsibility to take action to decrease the burden of current opioid issues faced by society. As medication experts, pharmacists are in a unique role to support the appropriate use and access to narcotic and controlled substances and collaborate with other health care professionals.

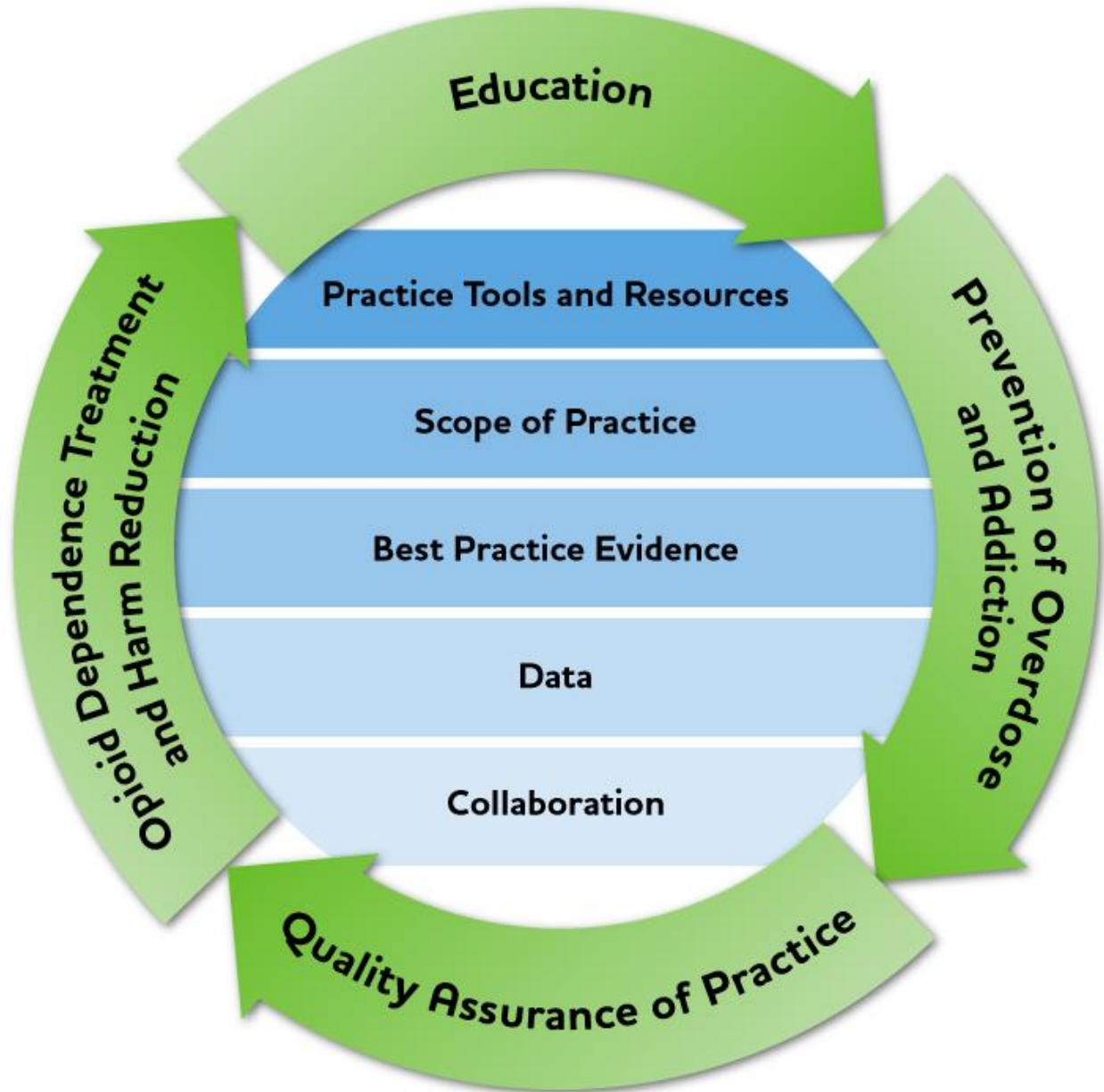
The Ontario College of Pharmacists recognizes that no single initiative will “fix” Ontario’s opioid-related issues and is committed to implementing a comprehensive opioid strategy that will align with national and provincial opioid-related goals. To ensure that a sustainable and effective approach is taken to addressing opioid-related issues, the College has developed a multi-pronged strategy to simultaneously address relevant areas of practice.

This strategy will support the College in meeting its mandate to serve and protect the public’s interest by:

- advancing opioid-related education for pharmacy professionals,
- improving harm reduction strategies and delivery of opioid dependence treatment,
- preventing overdose and addiction by supporting evidence-based and appropriate dispensing practices, and
- strengthening oversight of the provision of narcotic and controlled drugs to patients and the security of drug distribution.

## Opioid Strategy

The opioid strategy has identified four strategic priorities, each supported by the same five strategic areas of focus that will guide initiatives under each priority in response to the opioid crisis.



**STRATEGIC PRIORITIES** – *Outlines the four high-level areas related to opioid issues that the Ontario College of Pharmacists can affect as a regulator to ensure consistency in the consideration and implementation of opioid-related activities.*

## **1. Education for Pharmacy Professionals Regarding Opioid Related Issues**

To provide optimal patient care, pharmacy professionals require access to appropriate continuing education, training and resources regarding the treatment of conditions such as acute and chronic pain and the identification of patients at risk for opioid dependence or opioid use disorder. Ongoing education is required to ensure that pharmacy professionals have the knowledge, skills and competence to confidently make pharmacologic and therapeutic decisions regarding opioid therapy, as well as the ability to effectively communicate this information to other healthcare professionals and patients. To support comprehensive treatment of patients receiving therapy with opioids, pharmacy professionals also need appropriate training around common indications and comorbidities that may affect a patient's opioid use such as pain management, mental health issues and opioid use disorder.

*GOAL: The Ontario College of Pharmacists will collaborate with relevant stakeholders to ensure that educational and training opportunities and resources to support appropriate opioid dispensing and pain management treatment are available and communicated to pharmacy professionals.*

## **2. Opioid Agonist Therapy and Harm Reduction**

Optimal delivery of opioid agonist therapy by pharmacy professionals requires the development, identification and communication of resources to support evidence-based treatment and integrate a holistic approach to therapy that decreases the stigma surrounding substance use disorders and harm reduction. This includes ensuring an increased awareness and knowledge regarding dual treatment of comorbid conditions such as mental health issues, additional services available to support patients with substance use disorders and of cultural awareness to support the provision of culturally sensitive care. Pharmacy professionals are also well positioned to integrate harm reduction strategies into the current pharmacy practice environment to support increased patient access to services and decrease the negative consequences of drug

*GOAL: The Ontario College of Pharmacists will assist pharmacy professionals by developing updated guidance to support practice related to opioid agonist therapy and in identifying additional resources to support the treatment of opioid use disorder and implementation of harm reduction strategies.*

use.

### 3. Prevention of Overdose and Addiction

As healthcare professionals, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have a duty to ensure that patients are not harmed by their medications and receive benefit from therapy, as well as more broadly to protect public safety. This includes providing patient-centred care and supporting appropriate prescribing and dispensing of opioids. To meet this goal, pharmacy professionals require a supportive practice environment that encourages and enables multidisciplinary collaboration, and emphasizes patient-centred care as a priority. In addition, pharmacists require accurate and current information about a patient's prescription history. As medication experts, pharmacists must take a stewardship role with respect to opioid prescribing. Pharmacists are responsible for providing recommendations on opioid dosing and conversion and non-opioid treatment options for pain management to ensure patients are receiving appropriate therapy based on their individual circumstances and for identifying patients at risk of dependence or opioid use disorder. This requires communication between all members of the patient's care team (which can be formal or informal) to ensure that goals and messages communicated to the patient are aligned.

*GOAL: The Ontario College of Pharmacists will build on and align with the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) Standards of Practice and additional supplementary documents to support standards of practice and competencies for pharmacy professionals that enhance patient care around opioid issues. The College will also engage government in discussions regarding the need for access to electronic health records and system-wide data analysis.*

### 4. Quality Assurance of Practice

The primary mandate of health regulatory colleges is public protection, which is achieved by holding pharmacy professionals accountable for the safe, effective and ethical delivery of pharmacy services. Public protection with respect to opioid-related pharmacy services requires monitoring and enforcement around the provision of opioids to patients and the security of opioid distribution. To ensure that practice requirements are understood and being met the College must focus on opportunities to improve monitoring and enforcement of opioid procurement and distribution by pharmacies, narcotic security and control in pharmacies and the return and destruction of opioids. This can be achieved through collaboration with federal and provincial governments to access data that can inform College activities, better use of data from College programs, identification of measurable indicators and building capacity in College staff that support front-line pharmacy professionals.

*GOAL: The Ontario College of Pharmacists will monitor and enforce the security of opioid distribution and the provision of opioids to patients using data to inform and measure College actions and identify and focus on high-risk practices.*

**Strategic Areas of Focus** – *Outlines five different levers that the College will employ to support the achievement of the Strategic Priorities.*

### **1. Practice Tools and Resources**

The College will collaborate to identify gaps and needs in practice and ensure that both internal and external tools and resources are communicated to pharmacy professionals to support the provision of appropriate opioid-related services, including pain management.

### **2. Scope of Practice**

The College will consider how to optimize pharmacy professionals' scope of practice to best support patient outcomes and access to services.

### **3. Best-Evidence Practice**

The College will support pharmacy professionals in the application of the best available evidence, best practices and current prescribing guidelines around pain management.

### **4. Data**

The College will commit to using relevant and current data to inform College activities.

### **5. Collaboration**

The College will continue to build collaborative relationships with other health regulators, educators, government and other relevant healthcare organizations and leaders to support integrated and patient-centred care.