

Considerations:

- Law enforcement or licensing board action against a healthcare provider does not mean that the patients have done something wrong.
- When patients suddenly lose access to their healthcare provider, they may feel they have no other options but to turn to other sources to avoid withdrawal.
- Patients may not have access to their medical records; however, the [Pennsylvania Prescription Drug Monitoring Program \(PDMP\)](#) collects information on all filled prescriptions for controlled substances and is a useful tool for providers to view a patient's prescribing history to make informed clinical decisions.
- Physical dependence alone does not constitute a substance use disorder. [Learn more here.](#)

Meeting with a New Patient:

- Determine if the patient's current treatment is still providing a clinical benefit. If not, consider an individualized tapering plan to reduce their symptoms of withdrawal.
 - Learn more about [Assessing Benefits and Harms of Opioid Therapy](#)
 - [Checklist](#) for prescribing opioids for chronic pain
 - [Calculating Total Daily Dose of Opioids for Safer Dosage](#)
- Providers should reference the following tapering education:
 - [Guide for Appropriate Tapering or Discontinuation of Long-Term Opioid Use](#), published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), for advice on safe and effective tapering practice: As stated in the HHS Guide under Risks of Rapid Opioid Taper, *"Unless there are indications of a life-threatening issue, such as warning signs of impending overdose, HHS does not recommend abrupt opioid dose reduction or discontinuation."*
 - [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Tapering Opioids for Chronic Pain Pocket Guide](#)
- Providers may also reference benzodiazepine dose reduction plans, protocols for the treatment of benzodiazepine withdrawal, and learn about benzodiazepine withdrawal and the risks of concurrent opioids and benzodiazepines:
 - [Benzodiazepines: How They Work \(The Ashton Manual\)](#)
 - [Addressing Benzodiazepine Overuse](#) (Alosa Health)
 - [Example Tapers of Benzodiazepines](#) (Alosa Health)
 - [Overdoses Involving Benzodiazepines](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- If new patients do not have naloxone already, consider co-prescribing naloxone to reduce the risk of opioid overdose death. For more information on naloxone, visit: pa.gov/opioids.
- **National Clinician Consultation Center Substance Use Warmline:** Access free, confidential clinician-to-clinician **consultation** on topics including but not limited to:
 - assessing and treating opioid, alcohol, and other substance use disorders
 - when and how to initiate medications for opioid use disorder
 - toxicology testing: when to use it and what it means
 - identifying and managing withdrawal
 - approaches to adjust opioid-based pain regimens to reduce risk of misuse and harm

Call 855-300-3595 (9 am – 8 pm EST Monday – Friday) or [submit cases online](#).

If You Suspect A Patient Is At Risk For Opioid Use Disorder (OUD):

Screen for OUD and refer to treatment as needed. [Medication-assisted treatment \(MAT\)](#) in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies has been proven to treat OUD safely and effectively. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) provides [information on MAT](#).

- Access [screening and assessment tools](#) for patients.
- Identify your [county drug and alcohol office](#) and refer patients who may need treatment services. Local treatment programs are administered through county drug and alcohol offices called Single County Authorities. These programs can help with treatment funding, assess the need for treatment or other services, and make referrals to match treatment/service needs.
- **Anyone can call the Pennsylvania Get Help Now line 24/7:** 1-800-662-HELP (4357).
- Refer your patients to a [Center of Excellence](#) for OUD. These centers coordinate care for **Medicaid**.

- Providers and patients can also directly contact a treatment provider. Patients who have a private health plan and/or Medicaid/Medicare health insurance may call the number on the back of their health insurance card to identify treatment providers. Or, search online for a [local treatment provider](#) in Pennsylvania.

The [Pennsylvania Department of Health Patient Advocacy Program](#) coordinates and compiles state/local resources for patients who have lost access to care. If you are experiencing difficulties locating resources for you, your organization, or your patients, please contact the Patient Advocacy Program at ra-dh-advocacy@pa.gov or 844-377-7367 (Monday – Friday, 8am – 4pm EST).