

Tribal System of Care Learning Community: Impact of Opioids in Indian Country

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Opioid Epidemic

- Opioid misuse is a critical public health issue
- Overdose deaths are now the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S.

(Department of Justice, 2015)

- More than six out of ten drug overdose deaths involve opioids; from 2000 to 2015 over 500,000 people died from overdose.

(CDC, 2016)

Opioid Epidemic (cont.)

- Opioids include illegal drugs such as heroin and prescription medicines such as Percocet, Vicodin, OxyContin, Morphine, and others.
- Prescription medication misuse is a major cause of the opioid epidemic.
- Youths may use medications prescribed to others in their family or access prescription medications from peers.

Opioids and Child Welfare

- Misuse of opioids and other substances can be a factor leading to a family's involvement in child welfare.

(Children's Bureau, 2018)

- Exposure to opioid misuse during pregnancy is dangerous for the fetus and mother.
- Mothers need treatment during pregnancy for opioid misuse problems.

Opioids and Child Welfare (cont.)

- Babies exposed to opioids during pregnancy can develop Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)
(SAMHSA, 2017)
- NAS: breathing problems, seizures, fever, inability to sleep, hyperactivity, uncoordinated sucking and swallowing, irritability, excessive crying, difficulty with feeding and digestion
- Long-term effects on child development unknown.

Opioids in Indian Country

- American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people have the highest drug overdose rate of any ethnic group, with an age-adjusted death rate that more than doubled from 1999 to 2008. National data on opioids in Indian Country is limited.
- There are some regional and local data available.

(CDC, 2011)

Opioids in Indian Country (cont.)

- A study from a Midwest reservation with AI/AN adults reported that 30% used non-prescribed OxyContin in their lifetime, 18.9% in the past year, and 13.4% in the past month.
- Young adults were the most likely to report having used OxyContin; non-medical use among them was 2½ times higher than the same age group in the general population.

(Momper, 2013)

Opioids in Indian Country (cont.)

- There are some qualitative studies about opioid use in Indian Country.
- Focus group studies on reservations have shown that community members are more concerned about the use of OxyContin than any other substance, including marijuana and alcohol.

(Momper, Delva, & Reed, 2011; Radin, 2015)

Opioids in Indian Country (cont.)

- The main sources of OxyContin were sourced from health care providers or buying pills from individuals who had been prescribed.
- Elderly and disabled community members were reported to be selling part of their prescription supply to supplement their limited incomes.
- Also, a concern that Elders' money and opioid medications were being stolen by individuals misusing opioids.

(Radin et al, 2015)

Opioids and Trauma

- Historic trauma experienced by AI/AN communities contributes to the misuse of opioids, along with other substance use.
- In focus group studies on opioid use, some AI/AN participants were concerned that opioid drugs were being used to self-medicate because of negative feelings or to fill an emotional void.

(Radin, 2015)

Managing Opioid Misuse

- AI/AN communities can take steps to address the opioid epidemic.
- Tribal child welfare and mental health programs staff can screen for opioid misuse.
- Asking pregnant mothers about opioid use or prescription drugs is especially important to prevent problems for their babies.

Managing Opioid Misuse (cont.)

- Extensive research has shown the most effective treatment for opioid misuse problems is medication-assisted treatment.
- Medications (sub-oxone or methadone) can be given to prevent opioid abuse; gradually decreased and then stopped over time.
- The risk of overdose death is very high without medication.

(Connery, 2015)

Managing Opioid Misuse (cont.)

- Access to these medications requires a prescriber with a special license.
- Community members and tribal staff can encourage their local health care systems to hire providers or contract with those who have a license to prescribe sub-oxone or methadone.
- Naloxone is a drug that can prevent death by reversing the effects of an opioid overdose.
- Tribal staff, emergency responders, and community members can be trained in using naloxone.
- Indian Health Service and Tribal health systems have been distributing naloxone more widely and providing training in its use.

Managing Opioid Misuse (cont.)

- Partnering with cultural and spiritual leaders is critical for addressing the opioid epidemic.
- Culturally based treatment and prevention can help to improve a sense of self-esteem and personal strength in AI/AN community members, and that may address underlying reasons for misusing substances (such as self-medication for trauma).

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- Questions and comments?
- Experiences with opioids and child welfare?



Thank you.

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