

OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY (OAT)

Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder

Education and Practice Supports
for Community Service Providers in
Windsor and Essex County

Purpose of this Guide

This resource is designed for community service providers who help support people using opioids in Windsor-Essex County. It provides practical tools to help you understand what OAT is as a treatment option and how it works; build confidence in having conversations with clients about OAT; know when and how to refer clients to OAT treatment; and support clients in staying connected to care.

1.

INTRODUCTION TO OPIOID AGONIST THERAPY (OAT)

Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder

WHAT IS OPIOID USE DISORDER (OUD)?

Opioid Use Disorder, or OUD, is a health condition where a person has trouble stopping the use of opioid drugs, even when it causes problems in their life. Opioids include substances such as fentanyl, oxycodone, codeine, morphine, and heroin.

OUD is a chronic condition. It has nothing to do with willpower or character. Opioids change the brain chemistry which makes it difficult to stop using. Cravings to use opioids are driven by withdrawal symptoms which can be very intense and distressing.

WHAT IS OAT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

OAT stands for Opioid Agonist Therapy, a medically prescribed treatment for OUD. Opioid Agonists are long-acting opioid medications that help promote stability, prevent withdrawal, and reduce cravings for people with OUD.

OAT medications are one of the many options available for treating OUD, with medications including Buprenorphine/Naloxone (Suboxone), methadone, and slow-release morphine (Kadian). Anyone with OUD can be assessed for OAT, including youth and pregnant individuals (with guidance).

SIGNS MY CLIENT MAY BENEFIT FROM OAT TREATMENT:

Only a doctor or nurse practitioner can diagnose OUD and prescribe OAT. However, there may be signs that your client may find OAT helpful, such as when your client reports risky opioid use (e.g., frequent and/or heavy use, non-prescribed use, using alone), experiencing opioid overdoses, or signs of opioid withdrawal.

Another sign OAT may be helpful is that you notice your clients using opioids struggle with constant or multiple stressors related to finances, relationships, work or school, mental health, other substance use (OUD can co-occur with other substance use and/or mental health disorders), or chronic pain (OUD may develop from an episode of pain that is treated with opioids, either prescribed or non prescribed).



Signs of Opioid Intoxication and Withdrawal

Opioid Withdrawal	Opioid Intoxication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pinpoint pupils• Appear sedated• Drowsy• Nodding off• Slurred speech• Impaired cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dilated pupils• Watery eyes• Runny nose• Yawning• Shakes/twitches• Sweating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rubbing joints/muscles• Goosebumps• Irritability/anxiety/agitation• Restlessness



2.

OAT CONVERSATIONS TOOLKIT

LEARN THE KEY BENEFITS:

OAT is covered by OHIP and Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB).

OAT treatment can reduce withdrawal symptoms and cravings for opioid drugs, the risk of opioid toxicity or overdose, and the risks of infectious diseases, like Hep C or HIV. It can also improve the client’s functioning, quality of life, health, and relationships.

LEARN THE SIDE EFFECTS AND RISKS:

The most common side effects of OAT include constipation, sweating, and drowsiness. However, there may also be increased risks, including a larger risk of overdose, for clients who mix OAT with alcohol or other drugs. This is something you may want to look out for in clients you know are on OAT. Always carry Naloxone and encourage clients to use their OAT medication as prescribed.

HAVING THE CONVERSATION:

First, determine if your client is showing signs of OUD and may find OAT helpful. If that is the case, here are some prompts to get the conversation started:

- "Have you heard about medications that reduce cravings and overdose risk?"
- "Many people in Windsor-Essex are using OAT to stay stable. Would you like to hear more?"

Determine if there are any barriers they may face in accessing treatment. Barriers to OAT treatment can be transportation, mental health or cognitive issues, lack of social support, etc. You’ll want to brainstorm and find solutions to these barriers while connecting them to OAT.

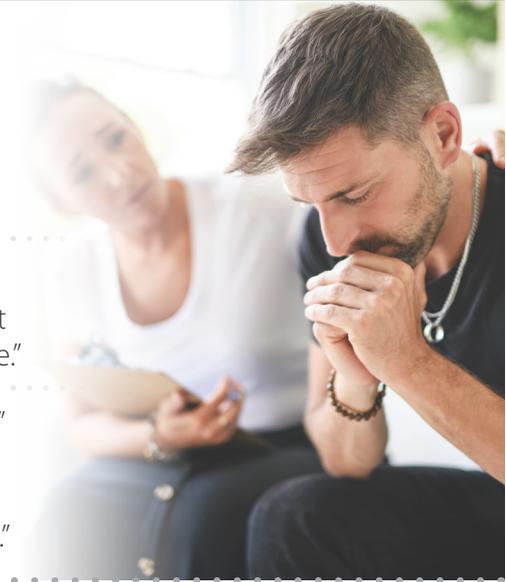
Make the connection or referral to the service alongside your client. A warm hand-off to the service you’ve connected them to lets them know they are not alone in starting this new treatment, and may help them follow through with referrals.

Offer ongoing support. Having ongoing, supportive conversations can make all the difference for the client and overall treatment success.

ADDRESSING STIGMA AROUND OAT

Clients may raise common concerns. Providers can respond in supportive, non-judgmental ways:

- 1) **Concern:** "I don't want to be judged."
Response: "Lots of people use OAT as a health treatment. It's like insulin for diabetes."
- 2) **Concern:** "I don't want to trade one drug for another."
Response: "OAT is medicine, not a street drug. It doesn't cause a high — it helps your body feel stable."
- 3) **Concern:** "What if I don't want to stay on OAT forever?"
Response: "You and your provider can make that decision together. Some people stay on for years, some taper off when they're ready."



SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION

Working with people who have OUD requires a non-judgmental and supportive approach. When supporting clients, keep in mind to use approaches that emphasize safety, trust, choice, respect, and empowerment. Remember, not all people with an OUD may be ready to engage in treatment.

Indigenous clients have specialized considerations when it comes to OUD and OAT treatment, so it may be best to collaborate with Indigenous wellness supports for the best approach to care. Always ask your client before you connect them to any other supports, but you can encourage wrap-around supports for each client that considers their own individual social, cultural, and community needs.



3.

CONNECTING CLIENTS TO OAT Treatment and Supports

WINDSOR-ESSEX RESIDENTS CAN ACCESS OAT THROUGH:

- Community Withdrawal Management Services: Anyone may refer; Provide case coordination for withdrawal management and support access to OAT and other wraparound services.
- Rapid Access Addiction Medicine (RAAM) clinics: Self-referral/Walk-in clinics that can prescribe OAT, plus offer substance use counselling and medical services.
- In-patient facilities: Usually require referral; perform withdrawal management (monitored/medicated withdrawal), offer structured bed-based treatments (including OAT) and wrap-around supports.
- Doctors or Nurse Practitioners (NPs): OAT treatment can also be supported by a client’s doctor or NP. Clients/patients can speak to their provider to learn about the options available to them.

HELPING YOUR CLIENT ACCESS OAT TREATMENT

Visit WEC Connect at www.wecoss.ca to see a full listing of current OAT treatment clinics and providers available to your clients.



For clients without access to WEC Connect through a digital device, see the list of OAT Medicine Clinics in Windsor-Essex County for more information (current November 2025).

OAT MEDICINE CLINICS IN WINDSOR-ESSEX

Clinic/Program	Location(s)	Self-Referral Type	Contact Info
Hôtel-Dieu Grace Healthcare - 24/7 Mental Health & Addictions Urgent Crisis Centre	Windsor 1030 Ouellette Ave.	Walk-In 16+	Crisis Line: 519-973-4435 Phone: 519-257-5111 ext. 72612
Erie St. Clair Clinic - RAAM	Windsor 1574 Lincoln Rd. Leamington 33 Princess St.	Walk-in	Windsor: 519-977-9772 Leamington: 519-326-7742
Aegis Health Group	Main clinics: - 1883 Turner Rd. - 1083 Ouellette Ave.	Walk-in	Phone: 226-946-1000
Roseville RAAM Clinic	2525 Roseville Garden Dr.	Walk-In 16+	Roseville Clinic: 519-988-1020
OATC (Ontario Addiction Treatment Centres)	- 1101 University Ave. W. - 9917 Tecumseh Rd. E.	Walk-in	Phone: 519-252-0991 Phone: 519-735-6500
Hope Recovery	- 1550 Ouellette Ave. - 3955 Tecumseh Rd. E.	Walk-in	Phone: 519-999-4530
Renew Medical Clinic	Leamington 4 Talbot St. E.	Call ahead	Phone: 519-325-1114
Horizons Opioid Treatment Service	Windsor 1428 Ouellette Ave.	Self-referral/call or book online first	Phone: 1-855-742-9449

List current as of November 2025. For the most up-to-date listings, visit WEC CONNECT at www.wecoss.ca/wec_connect



HARM REDUCTION SUPPORTS

Inform people who use opioids of where they can seek support & OAT treatments urgently, if in crisis (e.g., RAAM Clinics, HDGH Mental Health & Addictions Crisis Centre). This is for both people on OAT treatment, AND/OR clients who decline active treatment for OUD.

Clients who use opioids and/or OAT medication are also encouraged to carry naloxone kits. Naloxone kits are given out for free by pharmacies and many community service providers of people who use drugs (PWUD). For a listing of services that provide free naloxone kits to clients, visit <https://wecoss.ca/resource/opioid-poisoning-response-prevention>



If you are interested in a naloxone kit supply in your organization, contact the WECHU at 519-258-2146, ext. 3100, or email naloxone@wechu.org.



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References are available upon request.