



WECOSS Project Proposal – Treatment and Recovery

Project Name:

Expanding Access of Opioid Agonist Therapies (OAT)

Background & Purpose

Provide context for what conditions exist that have created the need for this project. Why is the project being undertaken? Describe an opportunity or problem that the project will address.

Opioid agonist therapy (OAT) is an effective evidence-based care modality for opioid use disorder (OUD) ([CAMH, 2016](#)). It involves taking a medically-prescribed opioid agonist, such as methadone or buprenorphine (suboxone), to prevent withdrawal, reduce cravings for opioid drugs, promote stability, and support individuals in their recovery ([CAMH, 2016](#)).

Although the Windsor-Essex County area has seen drastic increases in opioid-related mortality rates over the last five years, the rate of new users to OAT year by year has remained relatively low ([WECOSS Statistics, 2024](#)). In 2021, the rate of new users to OAT in WEC was 2.91 per 100,000 population, with no significant differences noted in rates reported over the years following (rate of 2.96 per 100,000 population in 2022; rate of 3.00 per 100,000 population in 2023). Anecdotally, community partners involved in the WECOSS have also reported that OAT is an underutilized service amongst their clients/patients and within the local population of people living with OUDs at large. According to partners, perceived barriers related to the underutilization of OAT locally include:

- Knowledge gaps amongst health and social service providers who support people who use opioids regarding what OAT is, the evidence behind it, who may benefit from it, and where/how to access it.
- Stigma surrounding OUDs and OAT as a care option across the health and social service system.
- Confidence and skill level of service providers to identify and appropriately support individuals who may benefit from OAT.

To address these needs, the WECOSS Treatment and Recovery Working Group will undertake a project in 2025 that aims to support improved use and access of OAT among those with OUD. The project will focus on educating relevant service providers about OAT as an evidence-based care method for OUD and extending resources/supports to these providers to better enable them to make appropriate connections to this service.

Goals & Objectives

What goal(s) does the project aim to accomplish? List the achievements/objectives that can be attained/met along the way to your goal.

- Improve knowledge and awareness amongst health and social service providers about OAT as an evidence-based care modality for people living with OUD.

- Increase confidence and skill level of service providers to facilitate supportive/judgement-free conversations with clients/patients who may benefit from OAT and connect them to appropriate supports.
- Create additional clinical/care pathways across the health and social service system to support clients/patients who may benefit from OAT in gaining timely and low-barrier access to this service.

Strategic Alignment

Which Modernization Recommendation(s) does this work support?

- **Priority #2:** Formalize healthcare provider engagement and education as key drivers in addressing substance use.
- **Priority #3:** No Wrong Door: Enhancing Access to Services and Supports
- **Priority #5:** Address the social determinants of health that impact substance use and community well-being.

Target Audience

Who will realize the benefits of the project (e.g., people who use drugs, service providers, etc.)? In other words, whose needs will be met from the project meeting its pre-defined goal(s)?

- **Primary Target Audiences:** Service providers who support people who use opioids (e.g., emergency department providers, primary healthcare providers, independent physicians, shelter providers, pharmacists).
- **Secondary Target Audiences:** People living with OUD

Project Activities

What activities or deliverables are within scope for this project?

- Identify organizations and/or service providers to engage with for OAT education and training.
- Develop and deliver relevant education/training and resource materials to service providers.
- Collaborate with community partners to create, implement, and promote additional care pathways for OAT across health and social service settings (e.g., expansion of OCEAN e-referral for OAT).
- Evaluate the efficacy and effectiveness of service provider education resources and care pathways established through this project.

References:

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). (2016). Opioid agonist therapy – Information for clients. Retrieved [here](#).

WECOSS Statistics. Accessed December 5th, 2024. Retrieved [here](#).

