

**Ministry of Health
and Long-Term Care**

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**Ministère de la Santé
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Dear colleagues,

We are writing to thank you for your ongoing efforts in the fight against opioid addiction and overdose, particularly with regards to appropriate prescribing of opioids for the management of acute and chronic pain, and to ask you for your continued commitment. Overdoses and other harms related to both illicit opioids as well as prescription opioids have increased in recent years and we are looking to all of you for assistance to address this growing concern and to ensure patient well-being and safety.

Last fall, we announced Ontario's first comprehensive Strategy to Prevent Opioid Addiction and Overdose, to improve access to pain management and also reduce the harms associated with both illicit opioid use and the inappropriate use of prescribed opioids. A core component of the Strategy is to modernize prescribing and dispensing practices to align with evidence-based guidelines and standards. This will not only improve patient outcomes such as reduced pain and improved function but also reduce the incidence of Opioid Use Disorder, overdose, or other adverse events related to these drugs.

As you may be aware, the update of the *Canadian Guidelines for Safe and Effective Use of Opioids for Chronic Non-Cancer Pain* was released May 8, 2017, which provides 10 recommendations on when to initiate, taper and discontinue opioids for chronic pain. Under the principle of Patients First, we ask that all of you:

- Review and familiarize yourself with these recommendations so that fewer patients with chronic pain are initiated on opioids;
- Review how to safely taper opioids, when appropriate, to prevent potential and inadvertent harms from sudden or rapid decreases in dosage or discontinuation;
- Review how to diagnose opioid use disorder, and work with experts in your community who can help you care for any patients with this condition; and
- Consider the appropriate use of long-term opioid therapy with your patients within the context of all pain management strategies, including non-opioid medications and non-pharmacological treatments.

Acting on what we heard from our Opioid Strategy consultations, the ministry, in collaboration with our system partners, has taken significant steps to increase the availability of and access to provider tools and supports for appropriate prescribing. For example, the ministry is funding:

- Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) Ontario Chronic Pain and Opioid Stewardship at the University Health Network to support primary care providers in the management of their complex chronic pain patients. ECHO Ontario Chronic Pain is currently offering an evening webinar series on opioid tapering and we encourage all of you to visit <https://www.echoontario.ca/Echo-Clinic/Chronic-Pain/Webinars-and-Events.aspx> to register for a session and learn more about the available supports under the program.
- The Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP) for the Medical Mentoring for Addictions and Pain network. This program supports family physicians by providing case-by-case support and ongoing continued professional development in mental health, addictions and pain care, and we encourage all interested physicians to contact OCFP for more information.
- Health Quality Ontario (HQO) to develop confidential opioid prescribing practice reports that show how your individual prescribing patterns compares to that of your peers and to best practices and provide tools and resources to support practice improvement. These reports will be available in November, beginning with primary care physicians, and we encourage all of you to subscribe to and review these reports regularly when they become available.
- HQO, together with experts and health sector partners, to develop two quality standards on appropriate opioid prescribing for chronic and acute pain, and an additional quality standard on opioid use disorder. These quality standards will be shared for public consultation in the Fall and released in March 2018 and will provide additional guidance on the appropriate prescribing and dispensing of opioids.

Moving forward, the ministry will be working collaboratively with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the College of Nurses of Ontario, the Ontario College of Pharmacists, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario, and other sector partners in health care education and training to develop a comprehensive plan to ensure that all health care professionals receive the training and supports they need to appropriately prescribe or dispense opioids.

We would like to thank you for your continued contributions to the healthcare system in Ontario, and we look forward to working with all of you to ensure that all Ontarians have access to the appropriate pain management treatment and supports that they need.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Eric Hoskins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Eric Hoskins
Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D Williams". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Dr. David Williams
Chief Medical Officer of Health and
Provincial Overdose Coordinator