

# OPIOID CRISIS IN NATIVE AMERICA FACT SHEET SERIES

## #1 | *Introduction to the Opioid Crisis*

### An Overview

Over-prescription of powerfully addictive opioid pain relievers beginning in the 1990s led to a rapid escalation of use and misuse of these substances by a broad demographic of men and women across the country. As a result, the number of people dying from opioid overdoses has soared—increasing nearly four-fold between 1999 and 2014. Opioid analgesic pain relievers are now the most prescribed class of medications in the United States, with more than 289 million prescriptions written each year. Over-prescribing opioids has also led to a resurgence of heroin use, as some users transitioned to using this cheaper opioid.

The increase in prescriptions of opioid pain relievers has been accompanied by dramatic increases in misuse and by a more than 200 percent increase in the number of emergency department visits from 2005 to 2011. Heroin overdoses were more than five times higher in 2014 (10,574) than ten years before in 2004 (1,878). Drug overdose deaths also occur due to the illicit manufacturing and distribution of synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, and the illegal diversion of prescription opioids. Illicit fentanyl, for example, is often combined with heroin or counterfeit prescription drugs or sold as heroin, and may be contributing to recent increases in drug overdose deaths.

### Impact in Indian Country

The American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) population is likewise affected by the opioid crisis. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 5.2 percent (72,000) of AI/AN aged 18 and older reported misusing a prescription drug in the past year and 4.0 percent (56,000) of AI/ANs aged 18 and older reported misusing a prescription pain reliever in the past year. These statistics are particularly significant because the opioid crisis has not impacted tribal communities equally; some communities face devastating rates of opioid use, while others have remained unscathed.

### Addressing the Crisis

In April 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) outlined an evidence-based Opioid Strategy. This five-point strategy aims to:

1. Improve access to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services
2. Increase the availability and distribution of overdose-reversing drugs
3. Strengthen the collection and reporting of public health data
4. Support research that advances our understanding of pain and addiction
5. Advance responsible pain management practices while also reducing inappropriate use of opioids.

Assistant Secretary McCance-Katz reinstated Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC): American Indian and Alaska Native Support Center Cooperative Agreement (AI/AN ATTC). The purpose of this program is to provide support for the ATTC Network, AI/AN, tribal organizations, urban Indian programs, state and local governments, and other organizations to develop and strengthen the specialized behavioral healthcare and primary healthcare workforce that provides substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and recovery support services to tribal communities.



The Tribal Law and Policy Institute provides free training and technical assistance to planning and operational tribal adult, juvenile, and family Healing to Wellness Courts (drug courts) as well as veteran's courts.

We seek to assist Wellness Courts in the development, implementation, and sustainability of program practices for increased program effectiveness, and for the long-term success of their participants.

We provide free onsite and offsite training and technical assistance.

Contact: [wellness@tlpi.org](mailto:wellness@tlpi.org)  
or (323) 650-5467





## Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts Opioid Webpage

The Tribal Law and Policy Institute manages a comprehensive website for Tribal Healing to Wellness Courts. The website contains an opioid page with the latest research and resources relevant to tribal communities and Wellness Courts. The page contains links to resources, webinar recordings, publication downloads, and information on upcoming trainings.

**Link:** [www.WellnessCourts.org/Opioid\\_.cfm](http://www.WellnessCourts.org/Opioid_.cfm)



## NCAI Opioid Initiative Webpage

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is working with tribes to help end the opioid epidemic in tribal communities. This webpage includes the latest resources for tribe to help address this growing problem in our communities. National Congress of American Indians (2019)

**Link:** [www.ncai.org/initiatives/partnerships-initiatives/ncai-opioid-initiative](http://www.ncai.org/initiatives/partnerships-initiatives/ncai-opioid-initiative)



## National American Indian and Alaskan Native Addiction Technology Transfer Center

This National Center provides education and training opportunities for individuals and groups involved in providing substance abuse treatment and counseling, including health professionals in primary prevention and treatment for substance abuse.

**Link:** <https://attcnetwork.org/centers/national-american-indian-and-alaska-native-attc/home>



## Reflecting on a Crisis: Curbing Opioid Abuse in Communities

Many tribal nations are facing extreme impacts of drug abuse on their citizens, maternal and family health, and the safety of their communities. The Policy Research Center has compiled some of the leading research on how opioid use and abuse are affecting Indian Country and ways in which health care providers and communities can respond. *National Congress of American Indians (Oct. 2016).*

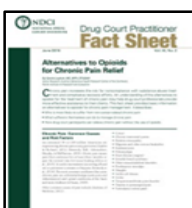
**Link:** [www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/Opioid\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.ncai.org/policy-research-center/research-data/prc-publications/Opioid_Brief.pdf)



## Understanding and Detecting Prescription Drug Misuse and Misuse Disorders

This fact sheet describes prescription drug misuse and provides information on: the attributes of the most commonly misused and addictive prescription drugs; the extent and consequences of misuse; side effects and toxicity; signs and symptoms of misuse; ways to identify and treat those who may have developed a drug use disorder. *National Drug Court Institute (Feb. 2016).*

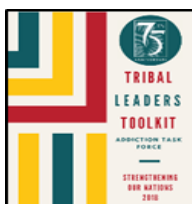
**Link:** [www.ndci.org/wp-content/uploads/18371\\_NDCI\\_Rx\\_Drugs\\_FS\\_v4.pdf](http://www.ndci.org/wp-content/uploads/18371_NDCI_Rx_Drugs_FS_v4.pdf)



## Alternatives to Opioids for Chronic Pain Relief

Chronic pain increases the risk for noncompliance with substance abuse treatment and complicates recovery efforts. This fact sheet provides basic information on alternatives to opioids for chronic pain management. *National Drug Court Institute (Dec. 2016).*

**Link:** [www.ndci.org/resource/publications/fact-sheets/](http://www.ndci.org/resource/publications/fact-sheets/)



## Tribal Leaders Toolkit: Strengthening Our Nation's 2018 - Addiction Task Force

This toolkit includes the latest policy brief on the opioid epidemic from the NCAI Policy Research Center, a briefing paper on the 2018 Opioids Legislation, and presentations from tribes on their efforts to address the opioid epidemic in their communities. *National Congress of American Indians (2018).*

**Link:** [www.ncai.org/initiatives/Addiction\\_Tribal\\_Leader\\_Toolkit\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ncai.org/initiatives/Addiction_Tribal_Leader_Toolkit_FINAL.pdf)



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