



VA Frequently Asked Questions

What is substance use disorder (SUD)?

- UD is a diagnosed mental health condition that causes people to have difficulty controlling their use of alcohol or drugs such as opioids. Untreated, this unhealthy use can begin to have negative effects on many aspects of life.
- “SUD” is a term that covers a broad range of substances. A clinical diagnosis may specify the type of SUD, such as alcohol use disorder, cannabis use disorder, opioid use disorder (OUD), or stimulant use disorder.
- <https://www.research.va.gov/topics/sud.cfm>
- https://www.research.va.gov/pubs/docs/va_factsheets/sud.pdf
- <https://wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2020/10-20201105Handoutfor6JtMHSACraig11.4.20.pdf>

What are signs and symptoms of SUD?

- Increased urge to drink or to use drugs
- Inability to stop drinking or using drugs
- Drinking or using drugs in hazardous situations (for example, drinking and driving)
- Changes in relationships due to drinking or drug use
- Impacts ability to fulfill major life obligations, including work, home, and social life
- Feeling sick and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when drinking or drug use stops
- Increased tolerance, which refers to the need over time for more alcohol or greater amounts of drugs to achieve the desired effect

What kinds of treatments are available to help me with my SUD?

- Psychotherapy or group therapy to develop coping skills and help address some factors that may contribute to ongoing use
- Residential treatment, where you may stay for 3-6 weeks to help stop using and begin to develop coping skills
- Medications to reduce withdrawal or cravings, depending on the substance used
- Medical and psychiatric care to help treat physical or psychological problems that may cause or be caused by substance use

What is opioid use disorder?

- Opioid use disorder is a brain disorder that can develop after repeated opioid use, creating an overwhelming desire for the drug. The disorder is a medical condition that can be managed with treatment, allowing people with opioid use disorder to regain a healthy and productive life.
- Opioids are a class of drugs that include heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and prescription medications for pain, such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine, morphine, and many others
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK553166/>
- <https://www.ada.gov/topics/opioid-use-disorder/>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/substance-use/opioid-use-disorder.asp>

What are signs and symptoms of OUD?

- Craving, in which the mind develops an overwhelming desire for the drug
- Inability to stop using opioids, even though use of the drug is causing harm (to physical and mental health, relationships, work performance, etc.)
- Giving up previously enjoyed activities because of opioid use
- Spending a lot of time to obtain, use, or recover from opioids
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms between use of opioids
- Developing tolerance, which refers to the need over time for higher doses of the drug to achieve the desired effect



I have been prescribed opioids for chronic pain. How can I help prevent opioid use disorder or other harm?

- Using medications other than opioids; treatments other than medications, such as acupuncture, physical therapy, yoga; certain devices such as transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation; cognitive therapies targeted to accepting pain.
- Avoid combining opioids with alcohol or other sedating medicines
- The use of the opioid medicine buprenorphine does not have the same interactions with the opioid receptors as many other opioids, which makes it safer with lower risks of sedation or sleepiness and lower chance to reduce breathing or overdose
- All patients with opioid prescriptions should learn about naloxone and opioid reversing medicine to help treat accidental overdoses. Medications should be stored in a locked box safely out of reach of pets or minors who may intentionally or accidentally access these medicines.
- Monitor for developing cravings or difficulty controlling your use and talk to your doctor if you begin to experience these symptoms

Are you concerned with your substance use?

- **Anonymous-Substance Abuse Screening** <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/substance-abuse-screening>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/substance-use/harm-reduction.asp>

Looking for treatment providers and programs

- Whether you are worried about your own substance use or that of someone you care about, VA has many options to help you take the next step
- Schedule a mental health appointment
- If you are already using VA health care, ask your primary care provider to help you make an appointment for VA mental health services
- If you are not already using VA health care, contact your nearest VA medical center to talk about your needs. Find your nearest VA medical center or Vet Center.
- New to VA? Apply for health care benefits. Getting started is simple. Create a free account online to simplify your enrollment process. Start your application today.
- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/substance-use/treatment.asp>
- <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/about/index.asp>

Need to find local VA Location

- **Find VA Location** <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/>

Need additional support?

- The **VA Substance Use Disorder Program Locator** will help you find local VA treatment programs that address all types of problems related to substance use disorder—from health effects to life-threatening behaviors. <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD.asp>

Vet Center Call Center

- **1-877-927-8387** is a free, around the clock confidential call center where Veterans, service members and their families can talk about their military experience or any other issue they are facing in transitioning after military service or trauma and get connected to their nearest Vet Center. Our call center team is comprised of combat Veterans from several eras as well as family members of Veterans.

Need residential rehab treatment?

- VA residential rehabilitation treatment, sometimes referred to as inpatient or domiciliary care, provides comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation services to Veterans with substance use disorders and other mental health conditions. Learn more about residential rehab care and steps for admission. Learn more about residential rehab care and steps for admission. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/get-help/va-residential-rehabilitation.asp>

Veteran Crisis Line

- 24/7, confidential crisis support for Veterans and their loved ones
- Dial 988 then PRESS 1