

## Opioid management

Harm from prescribed opioids (narcotics) is a tragedy—one that we can help injured workers avoid.

Medical evidence tells us that opioid medication can be beneficial in the initial acute period following an injury or surgery. As healing occurs, opioid use should discontinue within two to four weeks. Long-term use can be harmful to patients. In addition to deaths, dependence and abuse, multiple side effects are associated with chronic opioid use.

### There are policy limits on opioid payments

Our opioid Policy 04-06, Part II, A4 outlines when we will authorize payment for opioids for an injured worker. This policy ensures that prescribed opioids support treatment goals, including safe and early recovery, return to function and return to work.

This policy supports workers and their physician (or authorized prescriber) by providing clarity about coverage available for opioids prescribed for the treatment of work-related injury and disease.

This policy reflects current medical evidence and advice and requires authorized prescribers to follow the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) standard of practice outlined in “Prescribing: Drugs Associated with Substance Use Disorders or Substance-Related Harm” and the guidelines endorsed by the CPSA.

### Use for acute treatment

Under Policy 04-06, we'll authorize payment for opioids for pain for up to two weeks after an injury or surgery, with a possible extension to four weeks in total if there is indication to do so.

Current medical evidence does not support long-term use of opioids for pain management beyond the acute recovery period following an injury/surgery, with rare exceptions.

### Opioid medication beyond four weeks

**When opioids are prescribed beyond the acute period, we will monitor the medical information to ensure continuing the medication is:**

- Helping the injured worker improve in function (e.g., increased activity level).
- Helping to decrease the injured worker's pain.
- Supporting a safe and timely return to work.
- Not causing serious side effects.
- Not misused.
- Prescribed by one physician or authorized prescriber only.

We require detailed information in order to cover the cost of opioids for longer than four weeks following an accident or surgery. Before extending coverage, the worker will receive a package from us containing forms you will complete together.

If you feel the injured worker will require prescribed opioids longer than four weeks, you and the injured worker must discuss the contents of the package, complete the forms and send them back to us. The package includes:

1. A detailed cover sheet which explains the forms included in the package.
2. Copy of [Policy 04-06, Part II, A4](#) – Prescribed Opioid Analgesics (Narcotics).
3. Copy of the [Messages for Patients Taking Opioids](#).
4. [Opioid \(Narcotics\) Treatment Agreement form \(C913\)](#)
  - This patient contract is based on the opioid treatment agreement template from the CPSA. It is an expectation that you and the injured worker discuss and sign this contract.
  - As this should be part of usual care, there is no specific extra fee paid for this form. A complex modifier (e.g., CMGP) may be billable on the visit should extra time be needed, as per applicable SOMB rules.
  - This form is to be submitted only once, upon the initial completion of the treatment agreement.

5. [Medication Management Report form \(C914\)](#)

- The questions on this form have been incorporated into the [Electronic Injury Reporting](#).
- Out-of-province physicians are asked to submit this form instead of the usual progress report. The fee for this form is the same as that of the physician's progress report (C151).
- This should be included for all physician or authorized prescriber visits, or as required either by us and/or the physician or authorized prescriber, as long as opioids are prescribed for a work-related injury.

We will review the information along with the criteria outlined in Policy 04-06 and make a decision on whether we can continue to pay for the opioid medication.

*Note: All other applicable fees for the visit can be billed in addition to the above form fees. If you have questions about fees, please contact our Health Care Strategy team at 780-498-3219.*

## Tapering support is available

We partner with service providers to offer tapering programs to injured workers struggling with opioid use. Flexible treatment options are available.

If you'd like to discuss tapering support for your patient, here's how you can get in touch:

- Call our Physician Help Line at 1-855-498-4919. Ask to speak with one of our physicians to discuss opioid tapering options.
- Request tapering support and/or a call-back from a WCB physician on your progress report (C914).

*Together we can help minimize long-term opioid use and dependency. Our goal is to ensure injured workers receive the right treatment at the right time to promote a safe return to work.*

