

Opioid management

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

In addition to deaths, dependence and abuse, multiple side effects are associated with chronic narcotic use. Medical evidence tells us that narcotic medication can be beneficial in the initial few weeks following an injury or surgery.

There is also evidence that as healing occurs, narcotic use should discontinue within the initial two to four week period. Long-term use, especially beyond 12 weeks post-injury or surgery, can be harmful to patients.

There are limits on narcotic payments

Our narcotic (opioid analgesics) **Policy 04-06, Part II, A4** outlines when we will authorize payment of narcotics for an injured worker. This policy's primary focus is the management of non-malignant pain (generally up to 12 weeks following an injury/surgery).

The purpose of the policy is to ensure opioids are used appropriately and for the right reasons. It also allows for support services, including tapering options if required, to physicians and workers.

Under Policy 04-06, we'll authorize payment of narcotics for non-cancer pain for up to 12 weeks after an injury or surgery.

This is in alignment with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) standard of practice for "Prescribing: Drugs Associated With Substance Use Disorders or Substance-Related Harm" and the guidelines endorsed by the CPSA.

These guidelines have noted that rigorous studies have not supported long-term use of opioids for pain lasting more than three months.

We will monitor the medical information to ensure the medication is:

- Helping the injured worker improve in function (activity level).
- Helping to decrease the injured worker's pain.
- Supporting a safe and early return to work.
- Not causing serious side effects.
- Not misused.
- Prescribed by one physician only.
- Dispensed by one pharmacist only.

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

Prescribing narcotic medication beyond 12 weeks

If we receive information that the narcotic medication may exceed 12 weeks of use, the injured worker receives a letter with the following information:

1. A detailed cover sheet which explains the forms 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 C151.
 - This should be included for all physician visits, every two weeks or as required either by us and/or the physician, as long as opioids are being prescribed for a work injury.

6. Opioid Risk Assessment Checklist (C942)

- This is to be completed by the treating physician. The fee for this form is the same as that of the C151.
- This is to be completed once, at the time of completion of the treatment agreement.

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.

If you feel the injured worker requires prescribed narcotics beyond 12 weeks post-injury or surgery, you and the injured worker must discuss the contents of the package, complete the forms and send them back to us.

We will then 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 narcotic medication.

Tapering support is available

We partner with CBI Health to offer tapering programs to injured workers who are struggling with opioid use. With locations in Edmonton (southwest) and Calgary (northeast), flexible treatment options are available to your patient in both major centres.

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).

