

Newfoundland & Labrador
**College of
Social Workers**

**Guidelines Regarding Social Work
and the use of
Naloxone**

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Introduction

There is an ongoing opioid crisis in North America. The Government of Canada states that the “growing number of overdoses and deaths cause by opioids (powerful pain-relieving drugs, including fentanyl) is a national public health crisis. Protecting the health and safety of Canadians is a priority” (2024). Newfoundland and Labrador is also impacted by the opioid crisis. As noted by the Provincial Opioid Dependence Treatment Centre of Excellence; “Newfoundland and Labrador has experienced opioid-related harms including overdoses and deaths. Drug use affects all sectors of society and all ages” (2022).

The NLCSW acknowledges the role that social workers play in responding to the opioid crisis. The Provincial Opioid Dependence Treatment Centre of Excellence (2022) notes that with the increasing numbers of opioid overdoses there is a need for continued community public health measures to minimize the harm associated with opioid use. This document is to provide social workers with guidance as it relates to opioid overdose and the administration of Naloxone.

Social Work Practice

The *Social Workers Act* (2010) defines social work practice as “The assessment, remediation and prevention of psycho-social problems and the enhancement of the social, psycho-social functioning and well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities by using social work knowledge, theory and skills to

- i. provide direct counselling and therapy services to a client,
- ii. develop, implement, manage or deliver human service programs, including those done in collaboration with other professions,
- iii. contribute to the development and advancement of health and social policy,
- iv. conduct research in the science, technique and practice of social work.”

Administration of Naloxone

Social workers are dedicated to addressing the opioid crisis and providing essential services and therapeutic interventions for those who use opioids (e.g., fentanyl, heroin, morphine, and codeine), and those impacted by their use. Through their practices, social workers provide counselling and therapy, psycho-social education, and harm reduction strategies, while advocating for increased access to treatment and essential community services.

Social workers understand that preventing opioid overdose may also include the administration of Naloxone in emergent situations. According to The Government of Canada (2024):

- Naloxone is a safe and fast-acting drug that is used to temporarily reverse the effects of opioid overdoses.

- Naloxone is noted to be safe for all ages, and it only works if you have opioids in your system. Naloxone cannot be improperly used, and it does not create dependence.
- It has been reported that naloxone kits have successfully reversed thousands of overdoses across Canada.

Questions that arise regarding the education and administration of Naloxone within the context of social work practice include:

- 1) Are social workers able to educate clients and their support persons on the administration of Naloxone?
- 2) Are social workers able to administer Naloxone in emergency situations?

In thinking through these questions, social workers reflect on the Canadian Association of Social Workers (2024) Code of Ethics and the NLCSW (2024) Standards of Practice.

CASW (2024) Code of Ethics

Value 7: Providing Competent Professional Services

“Social workers continuously develop their professional knowledge and skill at the level required to provide competent professional services” (p. 24).

“Social workers practice within their level of competence and seek appropriate guidance when services required are beyond their competence” (p. 25).

“Social workers demonstrate concern for the interest and safety of services users by representing themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license or registration, certification, consultation received, supervised experience or other relevant professional experience” (p. 25).

NLCSW (2024) Standards of Practice

Standard 2: Competence

“Social workers are committed to offering the highest quality professional services to the public” (p. 4).

“Social workers demonstrate commitment to maintaining and enhancing their knowledge, skills and expertise and engage in continuing professional education” (p. 4).

“Social workers ensure they have the appropriate knowledge of and can articulate their use of social work theory, practice methods and intervention techniques” (p. 4).

Guidelines for Social Workers and the Use of Naloxone:

In the best interest of clients:

- Social workers can educate clients, and those in the client’s support network, on Naloxone and how to safely administer it, providing they have the appropriate education and training on Naloxone usage.
- Social workers ensure their training is up to date and based on the latest recommendations and best practices regarding Naloxone.
- Social workers ensure awareness of organizations that provide Naloxone kits in their area.
- Social workers can administer Naloxone when an overdose is reasonably perceived, as long as they are trained to do so and there are not other qualified health professionals present.

If the administration of Naloxone is expected as part of a Registered Social Worker’s (RSW) employment duty, the appropriate education and training should be provided by the employer. It is important that social workers are aware of employer policies and procedures pertaining to the administration of emergency first aid, including the administration of Naloxone. Where policies do not exist, social workers are encouraged to have discussions with the organization about specific workplace policies surrounding Naloxone administration.

Conclusion

With the ongoing opioid crisis in North America, it is understood that social workers may be involved in the administration of Naloxone in emergent situations. Social workers must be aware of their ethical and professional responsibilities and seek appropriate consultation regarding Naloxone administration and best practices. Social workers responsibilities include education on Naloxone and safe administration, remaining current regarding best practices, and administering Naloxone, in keeping with best practices, in situations if there are not other qualified health professionals present.

References

Canadian Association of Social Workers. (2024). Code of Ethics, Values and Guiding Principles. <https://nlcsw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/CASW-code-of-ethics-values-guiding-principles.pdf>

Fact Sheet ' Naloxone: Save a Life' – Government of Canada
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/healthy-living/naloxone-save-a-life.pdf>

Know How to Recognize an Opioid Overdose Poster
<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/healthy-living/problematic-substance-use/festival-poster-eng.pdf>

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Queen's Printer. (2010). *Social Workers Act*, SNL2010 c S-17.2. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. <https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/s17-2.htm>

The Provincial Opioid Dependence Treatment Centre of Excellence. Opioid Overdose and Naloxone. (2022)
<https://www.gov.nl.ca/hcs/files/Overdose-and-Naloxone-May-13-2022.pdf>

Appendix A

Naloxone: Save a Life

What is naloxone?

Naloxone (pronounced na-LOX-own) is a fast-acting medication used to **temporarily reverse the effects of opioid overdoses, also called an opioid poisoning. Naloxone can begin to take effect within 2 minutes. If a response to an initial dose is not seen within 2-3 minutes, subsequent doses can safely be given.**

Why does naloxone only work temporarily?

While naloxone is only active in the body for **30 to 120 minutes**, the effects of most opioids last longer. This means that the **effects of naloxone are likely to wear off before the opioids are gone from the body**, which causes breathing to stop again. Naloxone may need to be used again, depending on the amount, type, or how the opioids were taken (for example: oral, injection, etc.).

An **overdose is always an emergency**. Even if someone has taken naloxone, **always call for help**.

TIP: If you or someone you know is using opioids make sure to carry naloxone with you. It's available without a prescription and can be picked up at most pharmacies or local health authorities.

Is naloxone safe for everyone?

Yes, naloxone is **safe for all ages**. Naloxone only works if you have opioids in your system. Naloxone is safe to keep on hand because it cannot be improperly used and does not create dependence.

How is naloxone helping to address Canada's overdose crisis?

Naloxone has successfully reversed thousands of opioid overdoses across Canada. It is used by first-responders, such as paramedics and firefighters. Take-home kits are also available to anyone who is at risk of an overdose or who is likely to encounter one. Take home kits are **available without a prescription** and can be picked up at **most pharmacies or local health authorities**.

In Canada, two types of take-home naloxone kits are available:



Naloxone nasal spray – is sprayed directly into the nose where it is absorbed.



Injectable Naloxone – is injected into a muscle in your body – upper arm, thigh or butt are best.

Naloxone Saves Lives. Get a Kit.

- ✓ Naloxone temporarily reverses the effects of an opioid overdose to help restore breathing
- ✓ If you think someone is experiencing an opioid overdose, call 9-1-1, or your local emergency help line, then give naloxone. Follow the directions on the kit
- ✓ Take-home kits are available at most pharmacies, no prescription is needed
- ✓ Kits expire and should be replaced before the expiration date

**KNOW
MORE**

DRUGS: GET THE FACTS.
KNOW THE RISKS.

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Get the facts at Canada.ca/Opioids

 Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada



Know How to Recognize an Opioid Overdose

Anyone using opioids, even in small amounts, can overdose.

Fentanyl and other dangerous substances are being mixed with or disguised as other drugs like heroin, oxycodone, cocaine and ecstasy/MDMA.

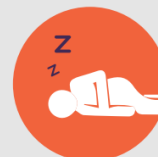
SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE



Blue or grey lips or nails



Dizziness and confusion



Can't be woken up



Choking, gurgling or snoring sounds



Slow, weak or no breathing



Drowsiness or difficulty staying awake

SUSPECT AN OVERDOSE?

CALL 911
or your local
emergency
number

Administer
NALOXONE
if you have it

STAY
with the person
until help arrives

Even if you have taken drugs or have drugs on you, the *Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act* provides you some legal protection.

**KNOW
MORE**

DRUGS: GET THE FACTS.
KNOW THE RISKS.

Together we can **#StopOverdoses**

Learn more at Canada.ca/Opioids



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