




# SNAPSHOT

## Effective medications for severe opioid dependence are not available in Ontario

### Why that is and what needs to be done



**5000+ deaths**  
related to opioid  
use between 2016  
& 2019 in Ontario

Injectable opioid agonist treatment (iOAT) is a safe and effective treatment option for individuals with severe opioid dependence. Currently, the medications used for iOAT are either not publicly funded in Ontario or are not funded at the required doses needed to be effective. Without access to these medications, an evidence-based, life saving, and cost-effective treatment is virtually unavailable to those who need it most. This snapshot focuses in on why that is and what steps are needed to fill this critical gap.



### MEDICATIONS FOR INJECTABLE OPIOID AGONIST TREATMENT (IOAT)

#### Diacetylmorphine (DAM)...

- ✓ ...can be more effective than methadone for severe opioid dependence<sup>1</sup>
- ✗ ...is currently not produced in Canada
- ✗ ...is currently too difficult to import to be used widely for iOAT

#### Hydromorphone (HDM)...

- ✓ ...is as effective as DAM (and more effective than methadone) for severe opioid dependence<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ ...is approved and publicly funded for iOAT...
- ✗ ...but not at a sufficient dosage needed to be effective

This snapshot was developed as part of a project led by Addictions and Mental Health Ontario (AMHO), with funding from Health Canada's Substance Use and Addictions Program (SUAP). The goals of the project are to assist provincial governments and health authorities in determining whether iOAT programs should be expanded in Ontario, and, where the need for expansion is identified, to develop resources to support planning. For more information and resources regarding iOAT in Ontario visit [amho.ca/our-work/iOAT](http://amho.ca/our-work/iOAT).

<sup>1</sup> Oviedo-Joekes, et al. (2016). JAMA Psychiatry, 73(5), 447-455.

*"Why wait until there's irreversible damage? It's like having life guards to prevent drowning. Don't wait until they are at the bottom of the pool..."*

- iOAT client

*"The only significant barrier to implementing iOAT programs in Ontario is the lack of coverage for people insured by the ODB [Ontario Drug Benefit program]."*

- [Open letter to the government of Ontario signed by 410 service providers and researchers](#)



### OPTIONS TO INCREASE ACCESS

- 1. Support domestic production of DAM**
  - Domestic production makes it accessible in Ontario (because of lowered costs and no import caps)
  - Canadian pharmaceutical companies are already interested
- 2. List iOAT medications on the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) program**
  - Requires more and higher concentrations:
    - HDM: 50, 75 & 100 mg/mL options
    - DAM: 100, 150, & 200 mg/mL options

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