



# ASAM

The Voice of Addiction Medicine  
American Society of Addiction Medicine

## ASAM National Practice Guideline Frequently Asked Questions

### Why was this guideline developed?

While opioid addiction is a progressive and chronic, life-threatening disease of the brain, it is treatable. In particular, using FDA approved medications in the treatment of opioid addiction is both clinically and cost-effective. However, less than 30% of treatment programs offer medications, and less than half of eligible patients in those programs receive medications. There is a significant gap between those who need treatment and those who receive it. ASAM's practice guideline outlines years of research and best practices in an easy to understand manner to educate and serve as a guide to clinicians in implementing the best quality of care. With the use of medications in addiction treatment, clinicians can: 1) reduce hospitalization and emergency department use, such as treatment of trauma; and 2) return patients to productive and healthy lives.

### How should this guideline be used?

The ASAM National Practice Guideline is a tool for clinicians to provide a more uniform, higher quality of care to patients with addiction involving opioid use. The National Practice Guideline is part of ASAM's overall quality improvement efforts and builds upon other recently developed clinical documents, including [Standards of Care and Performance Measures for Addiction Specialist Physicians](#). ASAM encourages policymakers and payers to use this guideline to support evidence-based coverage standards for medications that treat opioid use disorders and prevent overdose deaths. Many state regulators and payers have placed arbitrary limitations on medication dosage and duration and have also limited the range of medications offered to patients.

### What is unique about this guideline?

This guideline is the first to include in a single document all the FDA-approved medications available to treat addiction involving opioid use and overdose. Furthermore, ASAM's guideline comprehensively addresses transitioning from one medication to another and addresses overdose – including the role of naloxone for first responders as well as co-prescribing.

### What is the evidence basis of the guideline?

This guideline includes an analysis of the literature on the role of psychosocial treatments with medications. The Treatment Research Institute conducted a literature review as part of the project methodology.

This guideline was developed using the RAND/UCLA Appropriate Method which combines scientific evidence with clinical knowledge to develop recommendations. The accumulation of evidence through clinical trials significantly lags behind practice for the treatment of addiction involving opioid use. The RAND/RAM allowed ASAM to develop a valid set of recommendations using this well recognized methodology.

### **How do the guidelines support individualized patient treatment?**

The availability of multiple medications to treat opioid use disorders underscores the importance of guidelines that can help answer clinical questions and support individualized treatment options that meet the needs of the patient. Choosing a medication is a conversation between the patient and clinician – what medication to start; how to transition when one is not working, etc. ASAM's guideline helps clinicians in creating treatment plans that reflect the treatment of addiction as a chronic disease.

This comprehensive guideline also includes specific recommendations for taking into account the needs of special populations and addresses the following:

- Adolescents
- Pregnant women
- Individuals with pain
- Individuals with co-occurring psychiatric disorders
- Individuals in the criminal justice system.

### **How can clinicians learn how to apply this guideline in practice?**

ASAM will release a series of resources that easily explains the core recommendations and decision points in opioid addiction treatment. These include:

- A pocket guide and interactive mobile application
- Guideline article in *Journal of Addiction Medicine*
- PowerPoint slide deck
- Educational Webinars

All these resources and the full guideline will be available on ASAM's website at [www.ASAMNationalGuideline.com](http://www.ASAMNationalGuideline.com).