

# Supporting Individuals Experiencing Prescription Controlled Substance Disruptions: A Quick Reference Guide for On-Site Support Personnel

This guide equips on-site support personnel — such as community health workers, peer specialists, clinical staff, and public or behavioral health staff — with tools and strategies to provide timely, compassionate support to individuals experiencing disruptions in access to controlled substance prescriptions. On-site support personnel can assist patients during and after a disruption, either at the clinic site or in the surrounding area.

## Understanding Controlled Substance Prescription Disruptions

- A **disruption** occurs when patients lose access to controlled substance prescriptions, including opioids, benzodiazepines, stimulants, or medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). Common causes include, but are not limited to:
  - **Law enforcement actions** (e.g., investigations, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) registration suspensions, and/or arrests).
  - **State actions** (e.g., medical license restrictions or suspensions).
  - **Provider retirements, deaths, revocations, or clinic closures.**
- **Patients may be at risk** for the following:
  - **Overdose** if they turn to illegal substances (e.g., fentanyl).
  - **Withdrawal symptoms** from abruptly stopping prescribed medications.
  - **Mental health crises** (e.g., anxiety, fear, depression, or suicidal thoughts or behaviors).
  - **Return of uncontrolled pain**, due to delayed access to or inability to obtain prescriptions.

## Supporting Patients and Their Needs

### a. Role of On-Site Support Personnel

- On-site support personnel offer reassurance and compassionate care. They help patients feel safe, affirm that patients are not in trouble, and actively listen to their concerns.

### b. Key Responsibilities

- **Offer Trauma-Informed Care** ([traumapolicy.org/topics/trauma-informed-care](https://traumapolicy.org/topics/trauma-informed-care)): Patients may feel vulnerable or fearful. Offer compassionate, patient-centered care to support emotional wellbeing.
- **Provide Resources**: Ensure patients know where to seek care and provide resources, including:
  - i. Overdose prevention and naloxone information
  - ii. Mental health support ([988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org), [211.org](https://211.org))
  - iii. Patient handouts
- **Equip patients with risk mitigation tools**: When available, provide overdose prevention kits, naloxone (Narcan), and drug checking materials.

**Note:** When disseminating resources to impacted patients, it is important to recognize that some patients may not identify with terms like “treatment” or “recovery.” Language and support should be tailored accordingly.

**c. Continuity of Care and Additional Support**

- **Refer to Health Care Services:** Help patients connect with nearby clinics, telehealth services, or treatment providers for same-day or next-day care. Encourage patients to contact their primary care provider if they have one. Assist patients in calling the phone numbers located on their insurance cards and provide support with scheduling.
- **Emergency Referrals:** If patients require immediate care or treatment, assist them by facilitating referrals to emergency departments or other emergency medical services.
- **Connect to Essential Services:** As needed, provide patients with lists or referrals to other resources such as food, transportation, clothing, housing, or other services.

**d. Documentation and Follow-Up**

- **Track Engagement:** Work with response coordinators and other response partners to determine the best methods for following up with patients.
- **Participate in Debriefs:** After the event, debrief with team members and reflect on what went well, what was challenging, and how to improve future responses.

## Self-Care for Support Personnel

- **Manage Stress:** This work can be emotionally intense. Use support networks and engage in self-care to maintain well-being.
- **Know Your Limits:** Disruptions can involve cross-sector interactions. If certain situations feel overwhelming or triggering, support personnel should seek assistance or step back to allow someone else to lead.
- **Stay Connected:** Debrief with a colleague, supervisor, or trusted support person to reflect on your experience (e.g., sharing any challenging encounters, or noting what went well).
- **Take Time to Recharge:** Identify activities or things that support recharging and disconnecting. Consistent wellness practice builds personal resilience and enhances the ability to support others.

## Need More Support?

Scan the QR code or visit [linktr.ee/opioidpreparedness](https://linktr.ee/opioidpreparedness) to access helpful resources, including:

- Overdose prevention tools
- Mental health and crisis support (e.g., 988, 211)
- Self-care tips for support personnel
- Guidance on stigma and trauma-informed care
- Printable patient handouts from state health agencies
- ASTHO tools on overdose prevention and preparedness

