

Pennsylvania Department of Health



Brain Injury and Opioids Initiative

The Brain Injury and Opioids Initiative is a partnership between the PA Department of Health and the Brain Injury Association of PA to work with providers to support Pennsylvanians.

Opioid misuse has many unwanted consequences, including an intersection with brain injury.

Opioid use disorder increases the risk for brain injury. Those who misuse opioids or survive an overdose can experience brain damage because of lack of oxygen to the brain.¹ They are also more susceptible to brain injuries caused by falls and violence.

Growing evidence suggests that individuals with brain injuries may be uniquely susceptible to opioid use disorder. This finding is because of chronic pain, substance use, neurobehavioral challenges, medication mismanagement, and difficulty accessing effective treatment.²

Brain injury makes the likelihood of success in substance use treatment less likely. Brain injury affects an individual's ability to concentrate, remember, plan, problem-solve, and self-regulate and therefore reduces the likelihood of treatment success. Those with history of brain injury need adaptations to their treatment as well as long-term support to succeed. They also benefit from being connected to specialized brain injury services and resources.³

This initiative:

- Provides training to providers and professionals who work with individuals with substance use disorder, brain injury, or both.
- Offers assistance to providers who want to develop their ability to identify, treat, and refer individuals with both brain injury and substance use disorder.

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¹Corrigan, J. & Sayko Adams, R. (2019). The intersection of lifetime history of traumatic brain injury and the opioid crisis. *Addictive Behaviors*; 90: 143-145.

²Adams, R. S., Corrigan, J. D., & Dams-O'Connor, K. (2020). Opioid use among individuals with traumatic brain injury: a perfect storm?. *Journal of Neurotrauma*, 37(1), 211-216.

³Lorenz, L. and Doonan, M. (2019). A Policy Analysis of Access to Post-Acute Rehabilitation Services for People with Acquired Brain Injury in Massachusetts and Beyond. Massachusetts Health Policy Forum Issue Brief.



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