

VETERANS AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE

In Ohio, as well as the rest of the country, our veteran communities face unique struggles as they return from war and try to reconnect to life as it was before deployment. Whether as a result of mental health conditions, physical injuries, or various other factors, veterans may become dependent on substances such as opioids. Today, as the opioid crisis rages on across the United States, it is also important for veterans to understand what to look out for if a loved one of theirs begins to struggle with substance misuse. Organizations across Ohio are working hard to reduce stigma and raise awareness of available resources for veterans and their families. Together, we can address the issues that are facing our veterans and create a brighter future for them and their loved ones. With the information provided here, we hope you will find answers to commonly asked questions about substance use and its effects on the community, as well as places to turn if you need help.

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Chief Executive Officer

Ohio Assoc. of County Behavioral Health Authorities

OACBHA members help families with substance abuse in every county in Ohio.

Leaders from Ohio's statewide veterans organizations stand at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum in Columbus.

ABOUT RALI OHIO

The Rx Abuse Leadership Initiative (RALI) of Ohio is a coalition of partners and organizations working together to find and elevate solutions to the opioid epidemic. Together, we support a broad range of programs to address substance misuse, including prevention, treatment, and recovery services.

RALI Ohio is committed to sharing information and resources related to the safe use and disposal of prescription medications, as well as the warning signs of opioid misuse. Some of the organizations we work with to do so include the American Legion, Department of Ohio; AMVETS, Department of Ohio; Veterans of Foreign Wars, Department of Ohio; Ohio National Guard Association, Prevention Action Alliance, OACBHA, Recovery Ohio, CADCA, and Code 3.

Through our work with these statewide and national veteran organizations, RALI Ohio recognizes that the veterans' community in Ohio is particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of the opioid crisis. We are also mindful that many older veterans may be helping to raise grandchildren. As a result, we are working hard to ensure that veterans and their families are aware of and able to access available resources in their area. We hope this guide will help grandparents, parents, guardians, and all loved ones protect themselves and find support when they need it.



SPOTTING SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE

If someone you know has started misusing opioids, early intervention is important. Learning the warning signs of opioid addiction can help protect your family, friends and communities.

Physical and behavioral changes could indicate someone is misusing prescription opioids or illegal drugs, like heroin or fentanyl.

To learn more about warning signs, please visit ralioh.org/rali-cares to explore our virtual experience. Anyone over the age of 21 can take the expert-guided, interactive tour of a teenager's bedroom to learn how to identify hidden red flags that may point to a substance use problem. Spotting warning signs in teenagers can be particularly hard because young people go through many emotional and physical changes. [Prevention Action Alliance](#) has many tips and resources available for parents and guardians to help start a conversation and prevent substance use.



There are plenty of ways to help prevent the misuse of prescription medications. RALI Ohio is committed to raising awareness about the methods of proper storage, use, and disposal of medicines.

If you suspect a loved one is misusing opioids, there are resources that can help you prepare for a conversation with them. It's also important to talk to your doctor about prevention and treatment options. Detoxification, rehabilitation, and psychiatric care programs are available through the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#).

PROPER STORAGE AND DISPOSAL OF MEDICATIONS

SAFELY USE

- Always talk to your doctor about how to use a prescription medication before taking it.
- Be sure to follow dosing recommendations closely.
- Don't mix medications without first checking with your doctor.
- Never mix prescription opioids with alcohol.
- Don't take someone else's medication

SAFELY STORE

- Always keep prescription medications in a locked or secure place – and out of the reach of children.
- Have a family conversation about the dangers of misusing prescription medication.
- Never share medications with family members

SAFELY DISPOSE

- When finished using a prescription medication as directed by a medical professional, safely dispose of it rather than keep it in your medicine cabinet.
- There are several ways to easily and safely dispose of unused medications. Learn more below

Visit the [Food and Drug Administration](#) website or talk to your doctor about the best method for your medication.

One of the best things we can all do to help address the opioid crisis in our state is to safely dispose of unused prescription medications. There are several options:

1

HOUSEHOLD GOODS

Use household goods to dispose of your unused medications. All you have to do is mix your medicines with kitty litter or old coffee grounds in an airtight container and dispose of it in your trash can.

2

DRUG TAKE BACK CENTER

Visit a Drug Take Back center in your community. Click [HERE](#) to find locations in Ohio.

3

HOME DISPOSAL KIT

Put unused medications in the included pouch, add water, seal and dispose of it in the trash.

CAUSES OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE

There are many factors that can contribute to the misuse of or addiction to certain substances. Sometimes, people who are prescribed pain medications for an injury or operation will have a hard time stopping at the time their doctor recommends. Others may turn to opioids or other substances to deal with mental health issues. Veterans in particular

may experience symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or physical injuries related to their service. There is no single answer, but RALI recommends the following resources for more information on the possible causes of substance misuse:

- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)
- [Partnership to End Addiction - Is Addiction a Disease?](#)

- **AMVETS Department of Ohio – 1 is Too Many**

This resource focuses on the issue of veteran suicides, and while it addresses opioid and drug abuse, it also looks at other underlying causes of veteran suicides such as PTSD and other mental health conditions, as well as financial and legal troubles. Veterans in “crisis mode” or those who are feeling withdrawn can use *1 is Too Many* to turn to other veterans and gain a helping hand from people who understand what they are dealing with. Addiction and suicide are complex and closely linked issues, but community and connection are important in reducing the stigma around both.

RESTORING HOPE AND HEALTH TO SOMEONE WITH A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Substance use disorders don’t discriminate. Addiction can quickly become a reality for anyone, and it can be incredibly helpful to have a support system to help through such trying times. RALI Ohio and its partners know that together, we can all make a difference. Many different kinds of resources exist for veterans and their families. At the website below, you can find information and help specifically tailored to people with PTSD or mental health issues, women, caregivers, people in crisis, and more.

- **Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Ohio – Addiction Help**

SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE GOING THROUGH RECOVERY

If you suspect a loved one is misusing opioids, there are resources that can help you prepare for a conversation with them. It’s also important to talk to your doctor about prevention and treatment options. The organizations below have tips and resources you can turn to for help.

- **Recovery Ohio**
- **Department of Veterans Affairs Alcohol and Drug Dependence Rehabilitation Program**
- **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids**
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
- **Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America**

Veterans’ Treatment Courts

In Ohio, veterans who are in criminal justice proceedings may have their cases handled through one of 24 veterans’ treatment courts. Ohio’s veterans’ courts specialize in supporting veterans who may have substance abuse disorders, trauma, and mental illness. Behavioral health services are offered, instead of punitive sanctions. Ohio’s veterans’ courts are volunteer-led in each jurisdiction. Ohio’s strong dedication to the veteran community is credited for the success of these specialized justice programs.

- **Ohio State Bar Association - Ohio’s Veterans’ Treatment Courts Provide Support**

