



FAQs

Q. What if I or someone I know needs help with an overdose or opioid addiction?

In the event of a medical emergency, call 911.

For access to routine or crisis services to address suicidal thoughts, addiction or other emotional distress, you can call, text or chat [988 - the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#).

This service is free, confidential and available 24/7.

For Spanish speakers / Para hispanohablantes: [988 Lifeline ofrece servicios gratuitos en español](#). Marque 988 y presione 2.

Q. What Are Opioids?

The Georgia Department of Public Health explains that opioids are drugs that reduce the feeling of pain. Long-term opioid use can increase the chance of developing opioid use disorder (OUD) – a long-term brain disease that can hurt your physical, mental, and emotional health. Accidental overdose, injury, and death can also occur.

Common opioids include:

- Prescription opioids - codeine, fentanyl, hydrocodone (Vicodin), methadone, morphine, oxycodone (OxyContin), oxymorphone
- Synthetic opioids - heroin, fentanyl

Prescription opioids given by your healthcare provider are generally safe. However, some people may misuse opioids resulting in negative health consequences. People misuse opioids by:

- Taking more medicine than they need
- Taking another person's medication
- Taking medication with the goal of getting high
- Polysubstance Use (mixing drugs)

Synthetic opioids are opioids that are obtained illegally and not provided by a healthcare provider, such as methamphetamines and heroin. (Georgia Department of Public Health, 2023)

Q. How many people have died from opioid-related overdoses?

According to the CDC, nearly 645,000 people died from overdoses involving any opioid, including prescription and illicit opioids, from 1999-2021. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023)

The nationwide opioid epidemic started in the 1990s with increased opioid prescribing and opioid overdose deaths. Heroin and other synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, led to further increases beginning in 2010. From 2010 to 2020, the total number of opioid-related overdose deaths in Georgia increased by 207%. In October 2017, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services declared the opioid crisis a national public health emergency.

Drug overdoses have been increasing both in Georgia and nationally since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Georgia Department of Public Health reports from 2019-2021, the total number of opioid-related overdose deaths increased from 853 to 1,718, an increase of 101%. These increases were driven largely by fentanyl, a powerful synthetic opioid often found in drugs such as cocaine, heroin, and counterfeit pills. (Georgia Department of Public Health, 2023)

Q. What is the National Opioid Settlement?

In 2021, a nationwide settlement was reached to resolve all opioids litigation brought by states and local political subdivisions against the three largest pharmaceutical distributors, McKesson, Cardinal Health, and AmerisourceBergen (“Distributors”) and against manufacturer Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Inc. and its parent company Johnson & Johnson (collectively, “J&J”). These National Settlements have been finalized, and payments have already begun. In all, the Distributors will pay up to \$21 billion over 18 years, and J&J will pay up to an additional \$5 billion over no more than nine years. (National Opioid Settlement, 2023)

Q. Is Georgia participating in the settlement?

Yes.

In January 2022, Attorney General Chris Carr announced that the State of Georgia has signed on to the \$26 billion multi-state agreement with Cardinal, McKesson and AmerisourceBergen – the

nation's three major pharmaceutical distributors – and opioid manufacturer and marketer Johnson & Johnson. (Georgia Department of Law, 2022)

In May 2022, Governor Brian P. Kemp signed major opioid legislation ([Senate Bill 500](#)) to secure \$638 million for state and local governments to bolster critical treatment and prevention efforts. (Office of the Governor - State of Georgia, 2022)

The settlement agreement resolves investigations and litigation over the companies' roles in creating and fueling the opioid epidemic, particularly as to whether the three distributors fulfilled their legal duty to refuse to ship opioids to pharmacies that submitted suspicious drug orders and whether Johnson & Johnson misled patients and doctors about the addictive nature of opioid drugs.

The settlement requires the companies to provide substantial funding for opioid treatment and prevention and to implement significant industry changes that will help to prevent this type of crisis from ever happening again.

Q. How much will Georgia receive from the settlement and how will it be administered?

Georgia and its local governments stand to receive approximately \$638 million under the settlement agreement. Georgia's share of the settlement will be distributed among the state and local governments pursuant to a [Memorandum of Understanding \("MOU"\)](#). (Georgia Department of Law, 2022)

Per the MOU, the Georgia Opioid Crisis Abatement Trust ("Trust") was created to receive Georgia's portion of the settlement funds and any interest generated by those funds. The Trust is administered by a Trustee and a Government Participation Mechanism to oversee implementation of the settlement, make decisions regarding the expenditures of the funds and ensure compliance with reporting requirements.

The Trustee of the Trust is Kevin Tanner. Tanner also serves as the Commissioner the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). DBHDD serves as the opioid authority for the State of Georgia. See Commissioner Tanner's [full biography](#) for further details.

The Government Participation Mechanism is the Georgia Opioid Settlement Advisory Commission ("GOSAC"). GOSAC was established through [Executive Order](#) by Governor Brian Kemp in May 2023.

Q. Who can receive a portion of the settlement funds and how can they be spent?

Per the MOU, the settlement funds may only be used for “approved purposes” which include, but are not limited to, addiction prevention, treatment and recovery services.

Funds will be dispersed to state and local governments as specified in the MOU. State funds will be made available through a competitive application process for organizations wishing to provide addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery services among other approved purposes.

More details on the application process will be made available on this website in the near future.

Q. What if I have more questions or want additional information?

Please submit our “**Contact Us**” form.

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