

# Opioid Use Disorder as Cause & Effect of Brain Injury



Making the invisible visible since 1983

The Brain Injury Alliance of Arizona is a statewide social benefit organization dedicated to creating a better future through brain injury prevention, advocacy, and education. Please call us if you have questions about living well after brain injury.

## What is Acquired Brain Injury?

An Acquired Brain Injury is damage to the brain that occurs after birth that is not the result of a congenital or degenerative disease. Causes can include:

- ◆ A blunt or penetrating injury to the head (Traumatic Brain Injury)
- ◆ Stroke
- ◆ Hypoxia (insufficient oxygen to the brain) or anoxia (complete lack of oxygen to the brain)
- ◆ Can result from heart attacks, near drowning, and drug overdose

## What is Opioid Use Disorder?

Opioid Use Disorder is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a problematic pattern of opioid use leading to clinically significant impairment or stress.

## Opioid Use Disorder as Cause of Acquired Brain Injury

### Opioid Use Disorder Can Result in an Opioid Overdose

Opioid Overdose describes acute poisoning of the body as a result of excessive opioid intake. This is a serious condition that can result in death.

Opioid Overdose depresses oxygen intake and circulation, which can result in anoxia or hypoxia in the brain, often leading to lasting injury.

Opioid Use Disorder can also result in impaired decision-making that can lead to acquired brain injury.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), opioid overdoses resulted in over 47,000 deaths in 2017.

## Opioid Use Disorder as Effect of Acquired Brain Injury

Acquired Brain Injury frequently results in acute and/or chronic pain that can persist for weeks, months, or even years. Treatment for this pain can often include prescription opioids.

- ◆ **70-80%** of hospitalized patients are discharged with an opioid prescription.
- ◆ **21-29%** of Americans prescribed opioids go on to abuse them.
- ◆ **8-12%** of Americans prescribed opioids develop opioid use disorder.

## Recommendations

### Prevention

Overdose prevention and education programs must take into account the increased risk faced by brain injury survivors and make extra efforts to reach out to them as well as their families and caregivers. It is also imperative that these programs partner with professionals who work with survivors in order to create initiatives that effectively serve this population.

Medical professionals and policy-makers must partner to create guidelines that mitigate the risk of opioid addiction amongst brain injury survivors and provide potential alternative treatments for pain.

### Substance Abuse Treatment

Substance abuse treatment facilities must be mindful of the prevalence of brain injury amongst their population and make adequate efforts to screen incoming patients to determine any past BI history.

Brain injury survivors with an identified substance abuse disorder often have difficulty finding a facility that can help them while also working with their unique cognitive, behavioral, and emotional challenges. It is crucial that facilities are available that are staffed and trained to be able to meet these needs.