



## Punjab's Opioid Crisis

### What is the issue?

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- Punjab is one of the hotbeds of drug abuse in India, has a worsening Opioid crisis.

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- Punjab state government has taken various measures to enhance Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST).

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### What are Opioids?

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- Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription.

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- These drugs are chemically related and interact with opioid receptors on nerve cells in the body and brain.

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- Opioid pain relievers are generally safe when taken for a short time and as prescribed by a doctor.

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- As they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief they can be misused, when misused opioid pain relievers can lead to overdose incidents and deaths.

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### What measures were taken by Punjab to counter drug abuse?

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- It is estimated that Punjab has between 1.7 lakh and 2.7 lakh addicts.
- State government has promised to end the drug menace, through policing and by medical interventions.
- State government on pilot basis had introduced Buprenorphine-based Outpatient Opioid Assisted Treatment (OOAT) programme.
- Buprenorphine is currently administered in four rehabilitation and 21 community health centres in the state.
- As of mid-January 2018, 1,712 new patients were registered in the three districts where the pilot is running, the patient retention rate currently stands at 82.13%.

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### **What is the role of Buprenorphine in OST?**

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- Opioid substitution therapy (OST) is the proper procedure for the treatment endorsed by WHO, Buprenorphine is one of the OST drug given on a long-term basis.
- The treatment involves doctor-administered doses of Buprenorphine under controlled circumstances.
- The drug can play a major role in rehabilitating addicts if used under medical supervision along with psychosocial interventions.
- In India Buprenorphine is a Schedule H drug and is available at government-recognised pharmacies only.

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### **What are the Risks involved with Buprenorphine?**

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- Patients may get addicted to Buprenorphine, and start consuming it in non-medical environments.  
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- If injected along with depressant drugs, this can even lead to death.  
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- In Punjab there was a boom in the demand for Buprenorphine as addicts found the drug to be an alternative.  
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- Private psychiatrists had started prescribing the drug in excessive quantity to addicts, and it was being sold as an alternative to heroin.  
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### **What measures were taken to address misuse of OST drugs?**

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- Punjab government had ordered a high-profile crackdown on drug peddlers by placing restrictions on Buprenorphine.  
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- The government issued orders to restrict its supply after there were reports of misuse and illegal sale.  
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- Its availability was restricted to government and private rehabilitation centres only.  
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- Buprenorphine is sold under strict regulations and cannot be purchased without the prescription of a qualified doctor.  
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- It is also listed as a psychotropic substance under The Narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances Act.  
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**Source: Indian Express**

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