

# What are opioids?

**Opioids** are a class of drugs intended for pain relief. Opioids commonly prescribed for pain relief include hydrocodone and oxycodone. However, there has been a rise in new, synthetic forms of opioids such as fentanyl, which is much more potent than other variants. The prolonged use of opioids can lead to addiction and adverse health outcomes.

A growing body of research has linked opioid risk to workplace safety, as opioids are commonly prescribed for work related pain and injuries. Addressing this crisis requires a comprehensive approach that includes **education, prevention, treatment, and support** for individuals struggling with opioid addiction.

# Who's at risk?

Workplace safety hazards ranging from repetitive strain to acute traumatic injuries can increase risk of pain and subsequent opioid prescription. Removing and mitigating safety hazards is a powerful tool for prevention.

A Massachusetts study found that workers in certain occupations are at higher risk for opioid-related deaths. Overdose rates increased in physically demanding industries with high injury rates, like **construction, commercial fishing, and farming.**



# Did you know..

In 2021, there were 1,276 unintentional drug overdose deaths, the highest ever reported in Philadelphia.

82% of drug overdose fatalities involved opioids. Fentanyl accounted for 77% of all drug overdose fatalities in 2021.

The opioid epidemic is in its third wave, with significant increases in overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids, particularly illicitly manufactured fentanyl. Fentanyl remains a risk for workers that may turn to illicit drugs to manage chronic pain or stress.

Prevention is key to managing this problem, as fentanyl is much more addictive than other opioids.

*"An injury to one is an injury to all"*

## Our Work

PhilaPOSH is interested in exploring and promoting workplace safety and workplace centered addiction treatment as ways to reduce the impact of opioid abuse.

We have a detailed "white paper" report, as well as a digital version of this brochure, on our website, at:

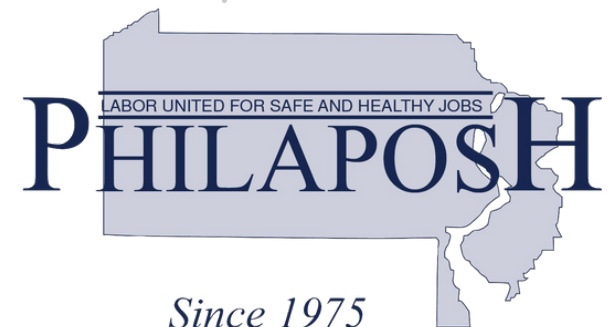
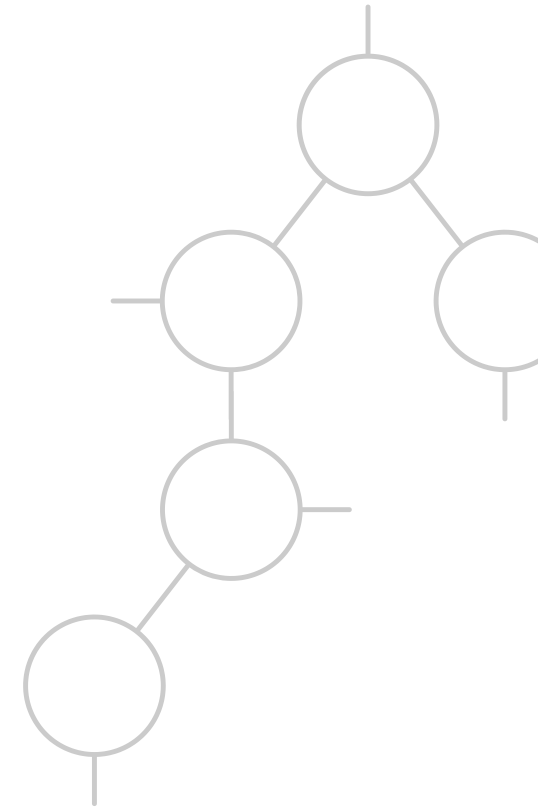
<https://philaposh.org/opioids>

### How can PhilaPOSH help you?

If you'd like to discuss or share how the opioid epidemic has affected your union, workplace, or organization, or how you've responded to these issues, please give us a call, or send an email to:

[arichard@philaposh.org](mailto:arichard@philaposh.org)

# OPIOIDS: A WORKPLACE HAZARD



*Since 1975*

## References

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2. Jalali, M.S., Botticelli, M., Hwang, R.C. et al. The opioid crisis: a contextual, social-ecological framework. Health Res Policy Sys 18, 87 (2020).
3. Philadelphia Department of Public Health. Unintentional Drug Overdose Fatalities in Philadelphia, 2021. CHART 2022; 7(3): 1-7

## Contact Us



215-386-7000



<https://philaposh.org>



[contact@philaposh.org](mailto:contact@philaposh.org)