

## Press Release

### **Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM) launches its first-ever national clinical trial to investigate treatments for prescription opioid use disorder**

The Canadian Research Initiative in Substance Misuse (CRISM) has launched its first-ever national clinical trial to study how patients respond to different treatments for prescription opioid use disorder, with the goal of improving treatment outcomes.

The use of prescription opioid medications has dramatically increased in recent years in Canada, leading to a rise in hospitalizations, and both accidental and fatal overdoses. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, there were 2,458 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2016. That number is expected to be higher in 2017 as deadly fentanyl and other opioids are readily available on the illegal drug market. In Canada, overdoses now account for more deaths than automobile accidents.

*“There is an urgent need for evidence-based, patient-centred treatment solutions to address the devastating opioid crisis in Canada. OPTIMA will generate evidence that is directly relevant to a major national priority in public health. There is no doubt that it will assist front-line service providers to better help individuals with prescription opioid dependence.”*

*Dr. Didier Jutras-Aswad*

*OPTIMA Lead Principal Investigator*

*Researcher and Psychiatrist, University of Montreal Hospital Centre*

This recently launched research study called OPTIMA (Optimizing Patient Centred Care: A Pragmatic Randomized Control Trial Comparing Models of Care in the Management of Prescription Opioid Misuse) – will take place in seven (7) clinical sites across the country, including community clinics and research institutions located in Montreal, Toronto, Sudbury, Edmonton, Calgary, and Vancouver.

There are a limited number of drug treatments for prescription opioid use disorder – known as opioid agonist treatments. These are available for individuals with an opioid disorder (ex: addiction to morphine, oxycodone, and/or fentanyl). As part of the national clinical trial, CRISM investigators will evaluate how patients respond to two of the most widely available treatments: methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone (trade name Suboxone).

Currently, methadone is the most widely prescribed drug treatment in Canada for opioid dependence. Studies have shown it to be effective, both in terms of keeping patients on treatment and suppression of illicit opioid use. However, there are potential individual and public health harms and challenges associated with methadone. Currently, practitioners are required to apply for and receive a special exemption under the Canadian *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act* in order to prescribe methadone. Patients on methadone must visit their doctors frequently to receive their medication, making accessing treatment burdensome and

there is an increased risk of drug interactions while on methadone with alcohol and other substances.

Buprenorphine/naloxone is more flexible, requiring fewer clinical visits and a more flexible take-home dosing schedule. This treatment is also safer in comparison to methadone, with lower likelihood of fatal overdose, fewer side effects and fewer drug interactions than methadone.

CRISM researchers are hoping to determine whether the flexible approach offered under buprenorphine/naloxone is as effective as methadone for the treatment of prescription opioid use disorder, while being more patient-centered, safer and less burdensome. The large majority of studies that examined these treatments focused largely on heroin users rather than prescription opioid users. OPTIMA aims to address this gap in the research, with the aim of improving patient outcomes in treatment, and decision-making for patients and health providers.

OPTIMA is the first study from CRISM, a national research network on substance use with a focus on research that can be implemented to improve public health. CRISM network comprises 500 researchers, service providers, policy makers, and people with lived experience based in BC, Prairies, Ontario, and Quebec-Maritimes. Supported by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR), CRISM is dedicated to conducting research and translating evidence-based interventions into clinical practice, community-based prevention, harm reduction, and health system changes.