

Opioids—mainly synthetic opioids (from both prescriptions and the street) such as fentanyl and tramadol — are currently the main driver of drug overdose deaths.

Opioids were involved in **47,600 overdose deaths (130 per day) in 2017** (67.8% of all drug overdose deaths).<sup>1,2</sup> **1,043 of these deaths occurred in Georgia.**<sup>3</sup>

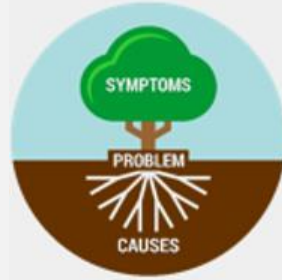
It is crucial to deal with the effects of the Opioid Crisis through treatment and recovery assistance along with interventions such as Naloxone.

**But we also need to deal with the epidemic's causes using an “upstream” prevention approach.**<sup>4</sup>



Per the **upstream model**, if we see bodies floating downstream, we need to travel upstream to find out what is causing this to happen.

Since the causes of behavior are multiple, it is necessary to identify psychological, physiological and sociological root causes. One way of doing so is applying the upstream model by asking questions such as the ones below.



### 1. Why are so many Americans hurting so much?

Since opioids temporarily relieve mental as well as physical pain, many persons take opioids to avoid suffering mental pain.

One reason so many of us are hurting is childhood trauma that is often associated with substance abuse. The experience of trauma can be long lasting and related to feeling emotionally overwhelmed by circumstances or a deeply distressing or disturbing experience in the past.<sup>5,6</sup> However, even children who grow up without such trauma can still develop drug abuse.

Interpersonal childhood trauma can result from what are called **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)** such as sexual abuse, physical abuse, witnessing violence such as domestic violence, emotional abuse and neglect, and divorce.<sup>7</sup>

### 2. What are risk factors and how do they put a person at risk for opioid dependence?

“Risk factors” are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, and cultural level that are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes.<sup>8</sup> Exposure to multiple, multi-level risk factors puts people at risk for drug abuse.

### 3. What are some possible physiological root causes of opioid abuse or dependence?

- Poor diet /Lack of sleep/ Lack of exercise
- Genetic predisposition to drug dependence
- Chronic pain

### 4. What are some possible sociological root causes of opioid abuse and dependence?

“Social Norms” are customary rules, often unconscious and unwritten, that contribute to governing behavior in society, either positively or negatively.

Some negative social norms regarding Rx drug abuse are:

***If it's legal it must be safe.***

The three big killers in the alcohol and drug world are all legal--in rank order they are, tobacco, alcohol and prescription drugs.

***Pills are the solution to human suffering and confusion.***

This message is constantly being pushed in very effective TV and other advertising in the U.S. being paid for by Big Pharma.

***Counseling and therapy are only for the weak and the crazy.***

Counseling helps deal with some of the issues causing opioid abuse and dependence. Seeing a counselor is not a sign of weakness. 99% of us could probably have benefitted from seeing a counselor at one point or another.