



## **BRAIN INJURY & OPIOID USE DISORDER: INFORMATION & SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONALS**

*50% of those involved in substance abuse treatment have a history of brain injury, and this estimate is even higher among those who also have mental illness.<sup>1</sup>*

In recent years, opioid misuse has become a significant public health challenge, with many unwanted consequences, including an intersection with brain injury. *Opioid use disorder increases the risk for brain injury.* Those who are addicted to opioids and/or survive overdose can experience brain damage because of lack of oxygen to the brain, which often happens repeatedly.<sup>2</sup> Individuals who misuse substances are also more susceptible to brain injuries caused by falls and violence. Additionally, *growing evidence suggests that individuals with brain injuries may be uniquely susceptible to opioid use disorder* as a result of their struggles with chronic pain, pre- and post-injury addiction, neurobehavioral challenges, medication mismanagement, and difficulty accessing effective treatment.<sup>3</sup>

Brain injury impacts an individual's ability to concentrate, remember, plan, problem-solve, and self-regulate. These neurocognitive challenges leave individuals with brain injury less equipped to participate in and benefit from conventional substance abuse treatment and more likely to experience treatment failures. In fact, research suggests that those with history of brain injury need adaptations to their treatment as well as long-term support in order to succeed. They also benefit from being connected to specialized brain injury services and resources.<sup>4</sup>

### **WHAT ARE WE DOING?**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health is partnering with the Brain Injury Association of Pennsylvania (BIAPA) to raise awareness of the intersection of brain injury and opioid misuse and provide training and consultation to substance abuse providers and professionals who work with individuals struggling with opioid misuse and/or addiction.

### **HOW WILL THIS HELP?**

By increasing both knowledge and awareness of this issue, we hope to build the capacity of professionals who come into contact with individuals with both substance use disorder and brain injury to identify and treat both problems successfully. This program will also highlight statewide resources.

### **WHAT WILL THE PROGRAM DO?**

- Raise awareness of the intersection of brain injury and substance misuse;
- Provide training to providers and professionals who work with individuals with substance abuse disorder and/or brain injury;
- Offer assistance to providers who want to develop their ability to identify, treat, and/or refer individuals with both brain injury and substance abuse disorder.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Tara DiGuilio  
717-753-5619  
diguilio@biapa.org

<sup>1</sup>Dams-O'Connor, K., Cantor, J. B., Brown, M., Dijkers, M. P., Spielman, L. A., & Gordon, W. A. (2014). Screening for traumatic brain injury: Findings and public health implications. *The Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, 29(6), 479.

<sup>2</sup>Corrigan, J. & Sayko Adams, R. (2019). The intersection of lifetime history of traumatic brain injury and the opioid crisis. *Addictive Behaviors*; 90: 143-145.

<sup>3</sup>Adams, R. S., Corrigan, J. D., & Dams-O'Connor, K. (2020). Opioid use among individuals with traumatic brain injury: a perfect storm?. *Journal of Neurotrauma*, 37(1), 211-216.

<sup>4</sup>Lorenz, L. and Doonan, M. (2019). A Policy Analysis of Access to Post-Acute Rehabilitation Services for People with Acquired Brain Injury in Massachusetts and Beyond. Massachusetts Health Policy Forum Issue Brief.

**This project was funded by the Pa Department of Health's Title V Maternal Child Health Services Block Grant**