

Integrated care

Integrated care models **combine physical health care with mental health and substance use care, emphasizing collaboration among a multidisciplinary team.** Through integrated care, patients have better access to coordinated, best-practice substance use and mental health interventions in a general health care setting.

About integrated care

Integrated care teams attend to a person's whole-health needs, resulting in improved care coordination, earlier identification of and treatment for mental health and substance use conditions, fewer access barriers for patients, and improved health outcomes.

Integrated care for prevention and treatment of substance use problems provides several advantages, including:

- reduced stigma around substance use from both the provider and patient perspectives
- opportunities for prevention and harm reduction education
- earlier identification and initiation of medications for opioid use disorder
- coordination of healthcare and substance use services through a team-based approach, optimizing patient safety and the potential for positive, sustainable outcomes

Integrated care teams use evidence-based screenings to identify mental health and substance use risks during routine medical appointments. For example, a primary care provider may administer screenings for depression, anxiety, suicidality, and alcohol or other substance use during a patient's annual wellness visit. Screenings like these are an important opportunity for a provider to start a conversation with the patient about behavioral health services they may benefit from.

One example of a screening program used within an integrated care model is Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment, or SBIRT. The SBIRT model effectively addresses substance use by integrating three core components:

- Screening: Allows early identification of a concern
- Brief intervention: Helps a person think about their readiness to change
- Referral: Connects people who need more intervention to the right source for treatment

About us

Healthy Minds Policy Initiative is a nonprofit LLC contracted by the Oklahoma Office of the Attorney General to support the Oklahoma opioid abatement grant program.

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Focus population

Integrated care is effective for children and adults in a number of health care settings, including from primary care, obstetrics and gynecology clinics, and hospital-based care. It should also be considered for the emergency room, where patients with substance use-related injuries often show up. In those instances, a patient could benefit from being seen by a behavioral health professional who can screen them for suicide and other risk factors and ensure they are connected with services before they are discharged.



How integrated care can look in action

John has a history of chronic back pain, anxiety, and depression, and he has been taking an opioid as well as medication for his depression and anxiety. John seeks out a new primary care doctor, Dr. Curtis, because he's not satisfied with his pain control. He tells his new doctor, Dr. Curtis, that he has been using more pain medicine than prescribed and is anxious about running out.

Dr. Curtis is concerned about John's need for increased medication and his risk for opioid use disorder, so she asks a therapist in her clinic to join their visit. The therapist, Lucy, provides a screening, and John's score indicates a low level of risk for substance use problems.

Lucy educates John about opioid risks and why it's important to consult with his doctor before he takes medication differently than prescribed. Lucy and Dr. Curtis schedule counseling sessions for John to learn cognitive behavioral pain techniques and ways of managing anxiety before his next follow-up visit.

Dr. Curtis examines John and aligns a new plan with current best practice guidelines for the treatment of chronic pain. Dr. Curtis talks with John about why opioids may not address his chronic pain and makes a plan with him to safely transition to effective non-opioid therapies. After John's visit, Dr. Curtis and Lucy talk about their plan for closely monitoring John's progress moving forward, including referral to more intensive therapy if needed.

Integrated care as an opioid abatement strategy

Integrated care in OB-GYN clinics: Utilizing integrated care in OB-GYN clinics offers availability of a team-based care approach for pregnant women who may be addicted to opioids to receive medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) and can assist with considerations for their baby who may be diagnosed with neonatal abstinence syndrome at the time of birth through development of a plan for safe care.

Integrated care in dental clinics: While dental clinics may often be seen outside the realm of "primary care" these services offer an opportunity to check in with patients on their mental health and identify any substance use concerns. Some patients who may not otherwise see a primary care provider

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may have dental needs that lead them to see a dental professional. Patients can receive screenings and assessments in these settings as well. Dental patients often receive opioid prescriptions for invasive procedures and would benefit from opioid use disorder education discussions in these instances.

Implementation considerations

- Education for teams on integrated care and MOUD is essential for successful implementation. Training and resources are available both locally and nationally, through resources such as the Providers Clinical Support System and the Advancing Integrated Mental Health Solutions (AIMS) Center.
- Organizations may need to collaborate for certain types of care. They should establish formal partnerships with memorandums of understanding that outline regularly occurring meetings, referral workflows, as well as care coordination planning and follow-up processes.
- Organizations should develop policies and protocols that solidify an integrated care framework and provide related training. For example, organizations should map care pathways to show how patients should move through the clinic process of being screened, assessed, treated and monitored, and which staff should be involved at each step.

Additional reading and resources

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing's [Center of Excellence for Integrated Health Solutions](#) and its [Comprehensive Health Integration Framework](#)

The AIMS Center's resource about [Collaborative Care](#)

SAMHSA's resource about [Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment \(SBIRT\)](#)

[Healthy Minds' explainer: Understanding integrated behavioral health care and the Collaborative Care Model](#)

2017 journal article in the Annals of Internal Medicine: [Primary Care-Based Models for the Treatment of Opioid Use Disorder: A Scoping Review](#)

2020 journal article in the European Journal of Health Economics: [Integrating Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Into Primary Care Settings](#)