



# OHIO OPIOID EDUCATION ALLIANCE

## About the Ohio Opioid Education Alliance

The Ohio Opioid Education Alliance is a public-private partnership focused on raising awareness of the addiction crisis in Ohio. The Alliance is comprised of over 100 business, education, nonprofit, civic and government organizations. The Alliance's objective is to challenge the mindsets of Ohioans, including reframing the approach to drug misuse prevention and eliminating stigmas associated with addiction and mental illness. Alliance members work together to make a difference in each of their respective areas of influence.

## Denial, OH PSA Campaign

In 2018, the Ohio Opioid Education Alliance launched its first public service announcement, an award-winning campaign set in the fictional town of *Denial, OH*. The research-based campaign highlighted that while prescription opioid misuse was prevalent across Ohio, many parents and caregivers did not believe it could happen to their kids. With a tongue-in-cheek tone, the campaign brought to light many of the misconceptions that parents have about prescription opioid misuse. The call-to-actions were clear — talk to your kids about opioids and dispose of your leftover pills.

The campaign reached Ohioans through television, radio, social media, earned media and grassroots activities, and had a positive impact in central Ohio. Because of seeing the ad, 57% of parents and caregivers reported talking to their kids about opioids. Further, 53% reported they were more cautious about disposing of their unneeded prescription opioids.

## Expanding Beyond Opioids

While prescription and illicit opioid misuse in Ohio remains a significant problem, Ohioans are struggling with much more. The global pandemic has exacerbated substance misuse overall as well as mental health issues. Alcohol sales have surged, drug overdoses are spiking and more Ohioans are reporting deteriorating mental health. Ohioans are aware that addiction and mental illness are on the rise, and information about help is widely available. But many Ohioans are not seeking the help they need or are unwilling to talk about the struggles they are experiencing. One critical barrier to seeking help is stigma.

Stigmas are negative beliefs and attitudes about people or topics and they're unfortunately very common, especially when it comes to mental illness and addiction. Many believe that addiction and mental illness are choices, which leads people to discriminate and judge. In reality, mental illness and addiction are complex medical conditions with underlying causes. The stigma around mental illness and addiction often create shame for those struggling and keep them from seeking the help they need.

That's why we're creating this new campaign. We want to eliminate that shame. We want to beat the stigma of addiction and mental illness.

## Research Behind Campaign

### Extensive research was conducted to inform campaign development:

- Nearly 20 existing mental health and substance use campaigns across the U.S. were analyzed to understand how a new campaign could be distinctive and breakthrough.
- In addition, Ohio's mental illness and substance use disorder experts were interviewed to inform the direction of the campaign.
- Multiple focus groups were conducted in which Ohioans shared their personal experiences with mental illness and addiction and the stigma that is attached to both.
- Campaign concepts were tested with Ohio's general population and with people with lived experience.

This research confirmed that many Ohioans don't understand addiction and mental illness, which leads them to make assumptions and judgements and ostracize people when they need help the most. What Ohioans don't readily recognize is that mental illness and addiction are often the result of underlying factors like genetics and family history and traumatic experiences and abuse. Moreover, addiction and mental illness are closely related — struggling with mental illness can put you at risk for developing addiction. The creative insight at the core of the campaign is “when you see someone struggling with drug or alcohol addiction, there is always more to the story than you know.”

## Beat the Stigma

Set in the fictional gameshow Beat the Stigma, the Ohio Opioid Education Alliance's newest campaign asks the audience to “challenge what you know about addiction.” The new campaign is aimed at helping Ohioans understand that addiction and mental illness are complex diseases — partly the result of genetics and other factors, which are largely out of a person's control, and not the result of moral failings or poor character. The Beat the Stigma campaign will encourage Ohioans to do three things:

- **Challenge what you know about addiction.** When you see someone who lives with addiction, there's always more to the story than you know. Practice empathy, not judgement.
- **Know your risk.** If there's a history of addiction in your family, know that this increases your risk for addiction. Know your risk and talk to your loved ones about what this means so they can make informed choices.
- **Take care of your mental health.** Mental health challenges can put you at risk for substance misuse.

The Beat the Stigma website will launch in the coming weeks where Ohioans can play a game to test their knowledge about mental illness and addiction, learn more about stigmas and access resources.

The state of Ohio announced its commitment of \$9.75 million to the initiative in February 2021, and the launch on Nov. 10 kicked off an effort by the Opioid Alliance to raise funds from businesses and community partners in Ohio.

Learn more about the Beat the Stigma campaign at [DontLiveinDenial.org/Beat-the-Stigma](https://DontLiveinDenial.org/Beat-the-Stigma).