YOU DESERVE QUALITY HEALTHCARE!

TIPS FOR HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR APPOINTMENT

It can feel stressful to go to the doctor. You may be concerned that your doctor will judge you for using drugs or that you won't get quality healthcare. We are working on improving this at VA.

HERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

1. Prepare for your visits

- Think ahead about your goals for the appointment. What is important for you to address?
- Make a list of questions you have and identify the ones that are a top priority.
- Write down concerns you have about symptoms or changes in your health. You may be asked when these started and how much they affect your daily life.
- Take care of any drug-related needs before the appointment. You want to be alert and not in withdrawal. You also don't want to be too high.
- Bring your IDs and/or medical insurance card if you have one.

2. What you share is up to you

- Talking about your drug use is a personal choice.
- It may take time to build a trusting relationship with your doctor before you feel comfortable talking openly- and that's okay!
- Answering questions about your drug use may help your doctor understand some of your health concerns. This can help get you connected to the right healthcare or treatments.
- If your doctor seems too focused on your drug use, it is OK to respectfully remind them that this is not your issue of concern.
- If you're interested in starting treatment to cut down on your drug use, your doctor can help. But you don't have to want to stop using to get quality healthcare

3. Understand your next steps

- Ask any questions about your doctor's recommendations, such as medications, exercises, tests, imaging, or blood work.
- Ask for assistance with making follow up appointments.
- Ask for next steps and treatment recommendations in writing.

4. People who can help

- Every VA Medical Center has a Patient Advocate. Reach out and talk with the Advocate if you have questions or concerns about your care. They can help.

Resources to Help Keep you Safe While Using

Syringes

Most states have Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) where you can access new supplies, including sterile needles, syringes, cookers, cottons, and naloxone. Scan the code to find the closest SSP or ask your doctor if your VA provides supplies

Overdose Prevention

Always carry naloxone (Narcan ®). You can ask your VA provider for a prescription or find free naloxone in your community.

Never use alone. If you are not able to use with other people around, call the Never Use Alone Hotline at 1-800-484-3731—Program it into your phone!

Call 911 if you are with someone who overdoses.
There are laws that protect you from criminal penalties.

Reduce Use

There are many resources available to help you reduce your use of drugs, if you're interested. If you are using opioids, medications like Buprenorphine and Methadone can help. Scan the code to learn more.

WARNING SIGNS THAT YOU SHOULD SEE A DOCTOR

- **Fever, Chills, Sweats**
- **Fatigue**
- **Shortness of Breath**
- **Severe Pain in Your Back**
- **Severe Muscle or Joint Pain**
- **Difficulty Moving Your Muscles**
- **Abscess**
- **Rash or Red Spots on Hands or Feet**
- **Slurred Speech, Weakness, Facial Droop**