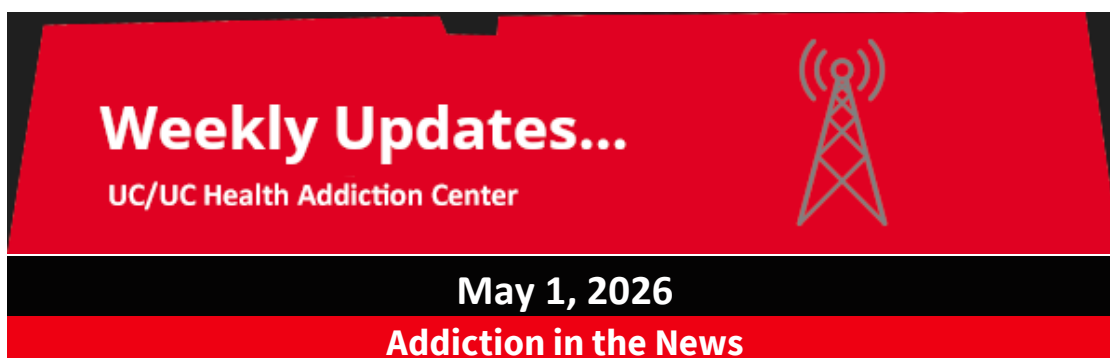


Welcome to the weekly newsletter from the University of Cincinnati/UC Health Addiction Center (UCAC)! Each newsletter includes highlights from addiction in the news topics, active funding opportunities offered by NIDA/NIAAA, and information about any new publications from UCAC researchers. Please email Jen Rowe (roweji@ucmail.uc.edu) to change your communication preferences. Thank you.

Thank you for your interest in the UC/UC Health Addiction Center - our mission is to generate new knowledge through innovative research, disseminate that knowledge through education and training, and provide high-quality, evidence-based treatment for individuals affected by addiction and related conditions. We are committed to supporting lifelong recovery and promoting dignity and respect for all individuals on their recovery journey.



UC/ Regional News

CoM Office of Research Gallery of Awardees

Recognizing the challenges of competing for funding to support faculty research programs, the College of Medicine Office of Research celebrates researchers in the Gallery of Awardees. The gallery honors those faculty members who have been awarded external grants of \$100,000 per year or more direct costs.

Congratulations to featured UCAC Researcher, Tongli Zhang, PhD, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology, Physiology, and Neurobiology!

Award: U.S. Army Contracting Command

Project Title: Developing an Effective Protocol to Build Credential Biomedical Models

Project Period: 2/1/2026-1/31/2029

Summary: This project aims to close a critical gap in biomedical modeling by developing a credible protocol for building and validating coagulation control models that reduce decision risk in military and civilian settings. Using a “learn by doing” approach, the work will integrate existing coagulation models with experimental data, Approximate Bayesian Computation, machine learning, and best practices in verification, validation, and uncertainty quantification. The resulting models and generalizable protocol will support informed decision-making, advancing military readiness as well as personalized medicine, drug development, and biomedical research.

Year-long study details how drugs are being smuggled into Ohio's prisons

Drugs flow into Ohio's prisons in ways that are both brazen and clandestine. The brazen way is with visible and noisy drones making drops inside prison yards or provided by corrections officers themselves. The clandestine way is when contraband is smuggled inside prisons on tiny pieces of drug-soaked paper. Potent narcotics addict, and even kill, men and women trying to turn from a life of crime while housed in state-run, taxpayer-funded facilities, which are under constant surveillance. In the words of one prison official, keeping narcotics out of prisons is "like playing a game of Whac-A-Mole." You close off one route and another...

Federal marijuana rescheduling: What it means for Ohio

WASHINGTON - Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche announced Thursday that state-licensed medical cannabis and FDA-approved marijuana products will immediately be reclassified as less-dangerous drugs. The move, which shifts state-licensed medical marijuana from Schedule I to Schedule III of the Controlled Substances Act, is the Trump administration's most significant step yet to reshape federal marijuana policy. Thursday's announcement from the Justice Department and the Drug Enforcement Administration doesn't make marijuana federally legal. Rather, it moves some cannabis products into...

Officials say substance use crisis defies simple solutions

FINDLAY — Substance use continues to be a persistent challenge for law enforcement and treatment providers. A 2024 U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 1 in 6 people age 12 or older met the criteria for a substance use disorder. Illicit drug use of any kind increased from 62 million people in 2021 to over 73 million people in 2024, an 18% jump in just three years. Locally, the reasons behind substance use are rarely simple. Zach Thomas, director of wellness and education at the Hancock County Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services, said drug use continues to be a problem in Hancock County...

Toledo man finds recovery through local behavioral health organization

TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG) - For many, addiction doesn't start with a choice. It starts with pain. And for years, Justin Boyd says that pain controlled everything. "I was really close to death and I remember praying to God, if you can get me out of this I'm ready to change my life. I want to be a good father," Boyd said. At 38 years old, Boyd said he spent more than two decades battling drugs and alcohol, a cycle he now understands was rooted in something deeper. "Drugs and alcohol are just a side effect from what I've learned. It has a lot to do with my trauma. A lot to do with my mental capacity, what I'm putting into my brain," Boyd...

Tobacco sales to minors rise in Lorain County, new checks show

ELYRIA, Ohio -- Lorain County Public Health officials say recent tobacco compliance checks show an increase in illegal sales to underage buyers, as the agency continues to focus on education over enforcement. The checks, conducted from

December 2025 through February, found that 28% of retailers — 22 out of 78 stores visited — sold tobacco products to an informant under age 21, according to the agency. The informant, between ages 18 and 20, attempted purchases as part of the annual review funded by the Ohio Department of Health. The results represent a 10% increase in noncompliance compared with the previous year...

Millions in opioid settlement funds headed to KY organizations

The Kentucky Opioid Abatement Advisory Commission is awarding more than 100 organizations with more than \$34 million in grant money in its largest settlement fund distribution yet. The commission's job is to distribute the state's more than \$900 million in opioid settlement funds. It has allocated more than \$85 million to 130 organizations, according to its website. Speaking Thursday in Lexington, Attorney General Russell Coleman called the settlement funds "blood money." "What we spend, what we announce — it is blood money to those that have lost their sons and their daughters," Coleman said. Grant...

'Russian roulette': Opioid deaths remain a concern in Monroe County, advocates say

Marilyn Grimes had already lost everything before she found herself in the back of a police car. In that moment, handcuffed and facing a felony, it dawned on her. She had to get sober. "I had finally come to that conclusion that where I was going to kill me, and I didn't want to die," Grimes said. Now, she's about 18 years sober from OxyContin, heroin and alcohol. She also directs Courage to Change Sober Living, a Bloomington 12-step sober living environment serving those struggling with substance use. She's open about her journey, in hopes it alleviates shame felt by those in recovery. "I'm proud of myself that I've accomplished..."

National News

Study on western diet, binge drinking, and liver disease

Four undergraduate students who will each receive their diploma at next month's Commencement ceremony at the University of Vermont are all leaving with more than their degrees, as they are credited as co-authors on a newly published, peer-reviewed study examining how a Western diet combined with binge drinking accelerates liver disease—a notable achievement for undergraduate researchers. The paper, "The impact of a Western diet and binge drinking on metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease in male and female mice," was published in *Experimental Physiology*. Among the 15 credited...

Study Finds Association Between Chronic Cannabis Use and Cardiovascular Dysfunction

In a study published in *JAMA Cardiology*, researchers found chronic cannabis use—whether through smoking or THC-infused edibles—is associated with impaired vascular function, even among young and otherwise healthy adults. Healthy vascular function allows blood vessels to dilate properly, deliver oxygen efficiently,

and help regulate key processes within the circulatory system. When vascular function is impaired, blood vessels are less able to expand, which can reduce blood flow and is considered an early warning sign of vascular disease, including conditions such as atherosclerosis, blood clots, and inflammation. The study...

Chronic pain tied to almost twice the odds of smoking and vaping, survey shows

New research from the University of Kansas shows people who experience chronic pain tend to consume cigarettes and e-cigarettes at higher rates than others. The findings, based on analysis of the National Health Interview Survey from 2014–2023, should inform therapies for both chronic pain and smoking cessation. The study appears in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine. "People get caught in this really vicious cycle where pain is driving smoking, smoking makes the pain worse, which makes it really hard to quit," said co-author Jessica Powers, assistant professor of psychology at KU. "We know pain drives..."

FDA Renews Authorization for Five IQOS Products to be Marketed with Exposure Modification Claims

Following FDA's rigorous scientific review, FDA issued a renewal of modified risk granted orders to Philip Morris Products S.A. (PMP S.A.) for two IQOS system holders and chargers and three flavors of HeatSticks products. With this renewal, these five products may be marketed with the following exposure modification claim - AVAILABLE EVIDENCE TO DATE - The IQOS system heats tobacco but does not burn it, this significantly reduces the production of harmful and potentially harmful chemicals, scientific studies have shown that switching completely from conventional cigarettes to the IQOS system significantly reduces your...

UK Parliament passes bill that will ban cigarette purchases for younger generations

LONDON (AP) — Opponents of smoking got a breath of fresh air as Parliament passed a bill that will put cigarettes out of reach for future generations. "The end of smoking, and the devastating harm it causes, is no longer uncertain — it's inevitable," Hazel Cheeseman, chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health, said after a decades-long campaign in favor of legislation approved Tuesday. Children born after Dec. 31, 2008 will be banned from ever buying cigarettes under the Tobacco and Vapes Bill. The legislation that needs approval by King Charles III — a formality — before taking effect will also allow the government to...

Natural disasters can cause another crisis for those recovering from opioid addiction

A day after Hurricane Helene ripped through western North Carolina in late September 2024, Toni Brewer had no power or water. The storm had strewn fallen trees across most roads, wiped out phone and internet communications, and put some neighborhoods near her Asheville home under water. Brewer cleared out the

food in her refrigerator, grabbed some clothes, and drove more than an hour southwest with her partner to Franklin, to stay with relatives. When she arrived, she opened the center console of her car, where she kept medication, and discovered another crisis. She had only three days' worth of Suboxone...

Standard treatment falls short for privately insured pregnant women with opioid use disorder, study finds

Opioid use disorder during pregnancy remains a critical yet under-addressed public health issue in the U.S., according to a new study at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. Although effective, evidence-based treatments exist, many pregnant individuals face barriers to accessing timely and appropriate care. Despite clear clinical guidelines recommending medication for opioid use disorder for all pregnant women with OUD, fewer than half receive this treatment. The findings are published in the journal *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. "Gaps in screening, diagnosis, and treatment—along with stigma and...

Opioid Manufacturer Purdue Pharma Sentenced for Fraud and Kickback Conspiracies

Opioid manufacturer Purdue Pharma LP (Purdue) was sentenced today in federal court in Newark, New Jersey, and ordered to pay criminal penalties of over \$5 billion for its role in fueling the opioid epidemic. "Purdue Pharma put profits over patient health and safety," said Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche. "The company willfully rejected the law and ignored the diversion of their highly addictive prescription drugs. Their actions contributed to the opioid crisis that claimed countless lives and destroyed entire families and communities. Today's sentence is a prime example of the Department's effort to redress past wrongs...

US dentists still prescribe far more opioids for pain than peer nations

People getting their teeth pulled or drilled by dentists in the United States are still much more likely to get powerful opioid medications than dental patients in other developed countries or even the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, a new study finds. That's despite steep drops in dental opioid prescription fills in recent years in the U.S., according to the new findings from a team from the University of Michigan Medical School and University of New South Wales published in the journal *JAMA Network Open*. Dentists worldwide have worked in recent years to move away from prescribing opioids for routine dental procedure pain. Newer...

Trump administration warns against using federal dollars on fentanyl test strips

The Trump administration is doubling down on its opposition to harm reduction services for people who use illicit drugs. In an open letter on April 24, the federal agency overseeing addiction and mental health policy warned its grantees against using federal funds to buy harm reduction supplies including sterile syringes and pipes, or to distribute test strips for common drug supply adulterants like fentanyl,

xylazine, and medetomidine. In a second letter bearing the same date, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration also warned against using certain addiction medications without accompanying...

Weapons-Grade Chemical Carfentanil Surges as Dangerous Substitute for Fentanyl

Nearly 2 decades after drug addiction sent him to rehab as a teenager, 36-year-old Michael Nalewaja had settled into a quiet life in Alaska where he worked as an electrician. That all came crashing down days before Thanksgiving 2025, when he and a mutual friend unknowingly took a lethal cocktail of fentanyl and carfentanil they may have mistaken for cocaine. "I heard the word 'autopsy' and I literally just collapsed to the floor," said his mother, Kelley Nalewaja, recalling the call she received from his wife. "Even if somebody had been there prepared with Narcan -- even if somebody had called 911 in time -- he was..."

Sustained changes in postoperative pain management after parotidectomy linked to AAO-HNSF opioid prescribing guideline

A new retrospective study published in *OTO Open*, the open-access journal of the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF), demonstrates that the Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) Opioid Prescribing for Analgesia After Common Otolaryngology Operations has had a measurable and sustained impact on prescribing practices following parotidectomy, which is a surgical procedure to remove the parotid gland. The study analyzed deidentified data from more than 25,000 patients across 80 U.S. health care organizations using the TriNetX database, spanning January 2013 through...

Clinical Trials Network (CTN) NE Node Science Series: Injecting Hope: Repurposing GLP-1 receptor agonists for treating SUDs

Date: May 21, 2026, at 12:00 PM ET

Join the CTN Northeast Node for the next installment of their virtual Science Series, featuring presenter Joji Suzuki, MD, FACLP, PI of the SuzukiLab at Brigham and Women's Hospital, speaking about the use of GLP-1 receptor agonists for treatment substance use disorders (SUDs). This 1-hour session will cover the basic pharmacology of GLP-1 receptor agonists and related medications. Then the emerging evidence-base for their use in treating substance use disorders in humans will be reviewed. Finally, the talk will cover the various issues and concerns that are now being raised when using GLP-1 receptor agonists.

Map Reveals States With The Worst Drug Addiction Problems

New data shows major differences across the United States in drug use, overdose deaths and access to treatment, with New Mexico ranking as the state facing the biggest overall drug problem. The report, released ahead of National Prevention Week by WalletHub, comes as the country sees a significant drop in overdose deaths. According to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), the U.S. recorded 87,000 drug overdose deaths in 2024, down 24 percent from 114,000 in 2023, which is the largest single-year decline on record. In the 12-month period ending in November 2025, there were around 68,000...

New executive order aims to accelerate psychedelic drug research and review

President Trump signed an executive order to ease various restrictions that have limited research on and access to psychedelics, which are mostly Schedule I drugs. But: It does not call for the immediate rescheduling of any substances. The details: The order...Directs the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to provide National Priority Vouchers to psychedelic drugs that have received Breakthrough Therapy designations for treating serious mental illness. This bring psychedelics into an FDA pilot program that boosts promising drugs targeting unmet public health needs, with the goal of accelerating the approval process...

Yoga may enhance traditional recovery programs, researchers find

Yoga may help support individuals recovering from substance use disorders, according to researchers at Penn State Brandywine. The team includes Kendall Taylor, a fourth-year psychology student at Penn State Brandywine, who recently presented the work at the Eastern Psychological Association's annual conference in Boston and at the campus's Student Engagement Expo. Led by Associate Professor of Psychology Daniela Martin and Associate Teaching Professor of Kinesiology Andrea Randolph and supported by a Commonwealth Campus Undergraduate Community-Engaged Research Award...

Social media promotion, ease of access increase risk of adolescent inhalant misuse

Two new studies offer insight into the factors that coincide with adolescent inhalant use in the U.S., a dangerous pastime that can have lifelong—or life-ending—consequences. The first report, described in the Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, found that millions of Americans were exposed to content about recreational nitrous oxide use from just 30 videos posted on social media in early 2025. Some of the videos included demonstrations of how to use inhalants. The second study, detailed in the journal Preventive Medicine, found that younger teens are more likely than older adolescents to engage in inhalant misuse...

US gambling addiction is 'out of control' and requires a public health response, experts say

Gambling addiction in the U.S. is becoming a fully fledged crisis and “demands a public health response,” activists have warned. “We’re seeing the evidence everywhere,” Harry Levant, director of gambling policy at the Public Health Advocacy Institute, told The Guardian. “The harm that is taking place to people, young men, families, people of all ages, it is simply out of control.” Levant notes the rapid expansion of online gambling markets and other platforms, including wager

sites such as Polymarket and Kalshi, which have increased significantly in popularity in recent months. Last year, a study by Siena College Research...

FDA Approves New Standalone Combo Pill for HIV

The FDA approved islatravir-doravirine (Idvynso) as a standalone, single-tablet regimen for treating HIV in virologically suppressed adults, Merck announced on Tuesday. Approval stipulates use of the oral combination in patients with HIV-1 who are virologically suppressed on stable antiretroviral therapy (ART), have no history of virologic treatment failure, and have no known substitutions associated with doravirine resistance. Co-administration with other ART medications is not recommended. Two- and three-drug regimens with second-generation integrase strand transfer inhibitors (INSTIs), such as bicitgravir, are standard...

Funding Opportunities



RFA-MH-27-135

Addressing Methodological Challenges with Clinical Trials of Rapid-Acting Psychotropic Interventional Drugs (RAPIDs) (R01 Clinical Trial Required)

UCAC Research Members New Publications

Symptom-Based Dosing for Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal

The OPTimize NOW Randomized Clinical Trial

Lori A. Devlin, DO; Denise C. Babineau, PhD; Stephanie L. Merhar, MD; Sara B. DeMauro, MD, MSCE; Walter K. Kraft, MD; Scott A. Lorch, MD, MSCE; Abhik Das, PhD; Scott A. McDonald, BS; Evan Rhodes, BSPH; Augusto F. Schmidt, MD; Lillian Trochinski, BSN; Margaret Crawford, BS; Thitinant Sithisarn, MD, PhD; Lawrence Leeman, MD; Kelley Zagol Kovatis, MD; Namasivayam Ambalavanan, MD; Ryan W. Smith, MD; Sucheta Telang, MBBS; Jennifer A. Tioseco, MD; Jennifer M. McAllister, MD; Scott L. Wexelblatt, MD; Bhanu Muniyappa, MD; Patricia K. Williams, MD; Susan C. Adeniyi-Jones, MD; Crystal D. Hill, MD; Tanner Wright, MD; Gregory M. Sokol, MD; Lynette Johnson, DO; Richard W. Hall, MD; Scott D. Duncan, MD; Karen Puopolo, MD; Krishna Dummula, MD; Ann Anderson-Berry, MD; Jonathan M. Davis, MD; Brenda Poindexter, MD; Leslie W. Young, MD; for the HEAL Evaluation of Limited Pharmacotherapies for Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (HELP for NOWS) Consortium

JAMA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2026.5782>

ABSTRACT

Importance: Infants with neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS) who receive pharmacologic treatment are traditionally treated with a scheduled opioid taper. An alternate approach, symptom-based dosing, may better align treatment with withdrawal severity.

Objective: To compare time from birth to medical readiness for discharge for infants with moderate to severe withdrawal treated with either a symptom-based dosing or scheduled opioid taper approach.

Design, Setting, and Participants: In this cluster, crossover randomized clinical trial with run-in period, 23 US hospitals cared for infants using the Eat, Sleep, Console approach (ESC) or Finnegan-based care (a comprehensive scoring system to quantify severity of symptoms; 15 ESC and 8 Finnegan hospitals) and their preferred primary opioid. Opioid dosing was guided by study-approved, site-specific algorithms. Infants with NOWS with a gestational age at birth of at least 36 weeks and at risk for pharmacologic treatment were enrolled between March 25, 2024, and April 9, 2025, with the last 3-month assessment on July 15, 2025. Sample size analyses were conducted between August 1, 2024, and September 23, 2024.

Intervention: Sites were randomized to 1 of 2 sequences: (1) symptom-based dosing followed by scheduled opioid taper or (2) scheduled opioid taper followed by symptom-based dosing.

Main Outcome and Measure: Time from birth to medical readiness for discharge.

Results: Of the 626 enrolled infants (mean [SD] gestational age, 38 [1] weeks; 49% male), 383 were cared for with ESC (primary outcome cohort). The mean time to medical readiness for discharge was significantly shorter in the symptom-based dosing group compared with the scheduled opioid taper group (9.18 vs 11.61 days; adjusted mean ratio [aMR], 0.79 [95% CI, 0.65-0.96]). There was no difference in the risk for initiation of pharmacologic treatment (0.4 vs 0.41; adjusted risk ratio, 0.99 [95% CI, 0.77-1.27]) or length of stay (10.91 vs 12.09 days; aMR, 0.9 [95% CI, 0.72-1.13]) between groups. For infants in the symptom-based group, 35% (95% CI, 25%-45%) required scheduled opioid dosing due to withdrawal severity that was not controlled with intermittent dosing. In the Finnegan cohort (n = 243; planned secondary outcome), there were no significant differences in time to medical readiness for discharge (15.99 vs 17.56 days; aMR, 0.91 [95% CI, 0.72-1.15]) or length of stay (17.38 vs 19.39 days; aMR, 0.9 [95% CI, 0.69-1.16]). The inpatient composite safety outcome occurred rarely (in the ESC cohort, 3 of 188 in the symptom-based dosing vs 2 of 195 in the scheduled opioid taper groups).

Conclusions and Relevance: Symptom-based dosing decreased time to medical readiness for discharge compared with a scheduled opioid taper approach among infants cared for with ESC.

Trial Registration ClinicalTrials.gov Identifier: NCT05980260

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