



# Suboxone Research

**Report**

Toronto

Edmonton

Calgary

Montreal

Philadelphia

New York

## Background

- ▶ Research was conducted among general practitioner physicians in Ontario to understand their experience with opioids and opioid addiction.
- ▶ More specifically, the research was designed to meet the following objectives:
  - ▶ Explore the likelihood of GP's prescribing opioids;
  - ▶ Investigate the possibility that patients are becoming addicted to opioids;
  - ▶ Understand how GP's deal with addiction, both prior to prescribing and after addiction is suspected, including what, if any, treatment method is suggested;
  - ▶ Introduce the features of Suboxone and obtain reaction including likelihood to prescribe;
  - ▶ Determine what, if any, features of Suboxone makes it a better option than drug substitution treatments available now.

## Method

- ▶ An online study was conducted with general practitioner physicians in Ontario.
- ▶ All physicians were licensed, in good standing, to practice medicine in the province of Ontario.
- ▶ In total, 224 physicians were sampled. Of these, 13 were screened out as they said they did not prescribe opioids to any patients in a typical three month period. The other 211 physicians completed the survey and have been included in this report.
- ▶ With a sample of 211, results can be considered accurate to within +/- 6.8%, 19 times out of 20.
- ▶ Surveys were completed between June 3<sup>rd</sup> and June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

# Key Findings

# Key Findings

## Opioid Addiction is a Problem:

- ▶ Most Ontario doctors sampled prescribe Opioids to their patients. They indicate that their patients do show symptoms of dependency, and most feel the need to intervene at least occasionally. However, only half always screen their patients for dependency issues when prescribing opioid medications.
- ▶ The most common symptoms doctors are noticing in their patients taking opioid medication includes taking more medication than intended, needing a higher prescriptions to obtain the same effect, being unsuccessful at cutting back doses and experiencing withdrawal. Additionally, over half of doctors often/ occasionally also receive requests from their patients for additional prescriptions.
- ▶ While half of these doctors say that patients taking opioids are also not dependent on heroin, some are still unsure. Those who say that they are make up 1% to 50% of their patients currently taking opioids.

# Key Findings

## Doctors Do Suggest Treatment:

- ▶ Almost all doctors will suggest treatments to patients who are dependent on opioids. The most commonly suggested treatments include out-patient rehabilitation, counseling and drug substitution therapy.
- ▶ Methadone is one of the prescribed drug substitution therapies available. However, most doctor's biggest concern with prescribing methadone to patients includes the potential for misuse, overdose, as well as the potential for combining it with heroin or illicit opioids.
- ▶ Despite their concerns, most doctors in Ontario feel that drug substitution therapy is beneficial to their patients and to society.

## Key Findings

### While Suboxone is not well known, it does generate interest:

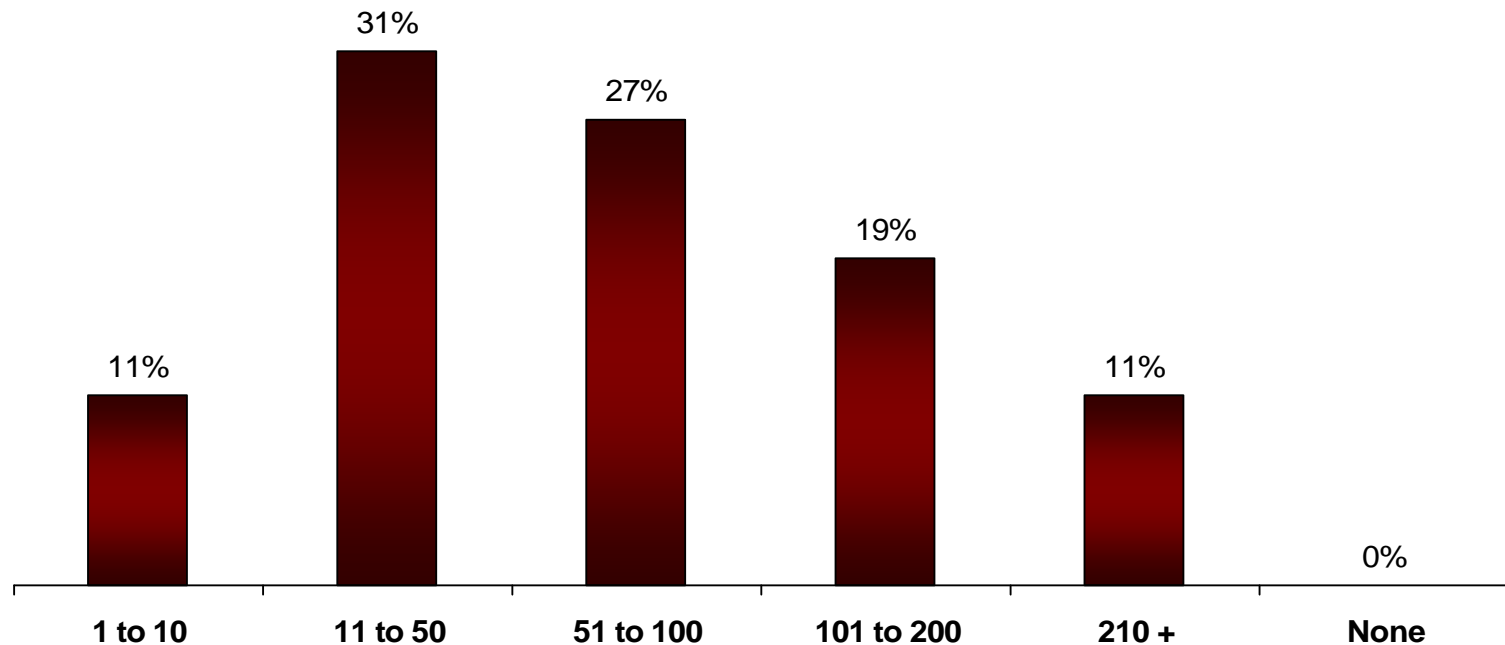
- ▶ The majority of Ontario doctor's are unaware of the new treatment option for opioid dependency, Suboxone. Of those who know of it, only know the name or that it is an opiate replacement option.
- ▶ When doctors were informed of some of the benefits, most said that they are likely to prescribe it to their patients, but they still need to have more information about it.
- ▶ When compared to other opioid treatments on the market, doctor's feel that Suboxone has many beneficial features, but the cost is the only minor drawback.
- ▶ Over half of all Ontario doctors feel that Suboxone should be covered under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Formulary, because while it is an important drug, it should be made accessible to the public, including the cost.

# Results in Detail

# Opioid Addiction

## Opioids Prescriptions are Common

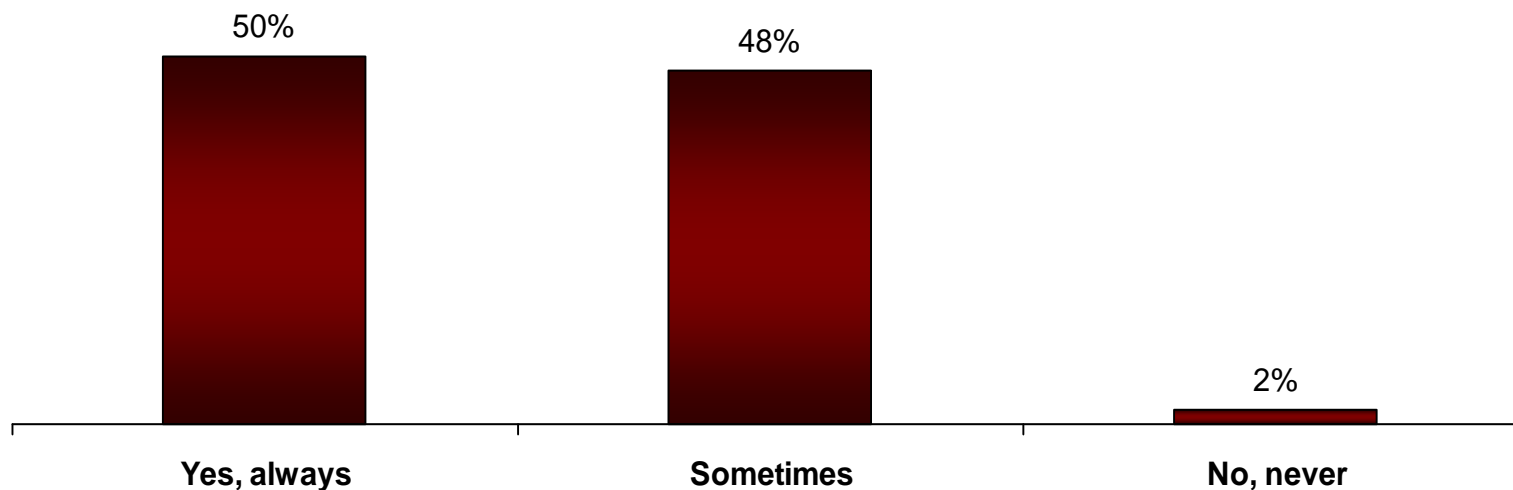
- ▶ Opioids are commonly prescribed, with only 6% of the Ontario doctors sampled saying they do not prescribe these drugs. (These doctors are not included in this study.)
- ▶ About half (58%) say they have prescribed the drug to between 11 and 100 patients in the past three month, with on average, 107 patients being prescribed the drugs in this time frame.



Q1) Among the patients that you see in a 3 month period, for how many do you prescribe bropioids/narcotics including xycodone, morphine, meperidine and acetaminophen- codeine? Base: Total n= 211

## Only Half Always Screen for Addiction

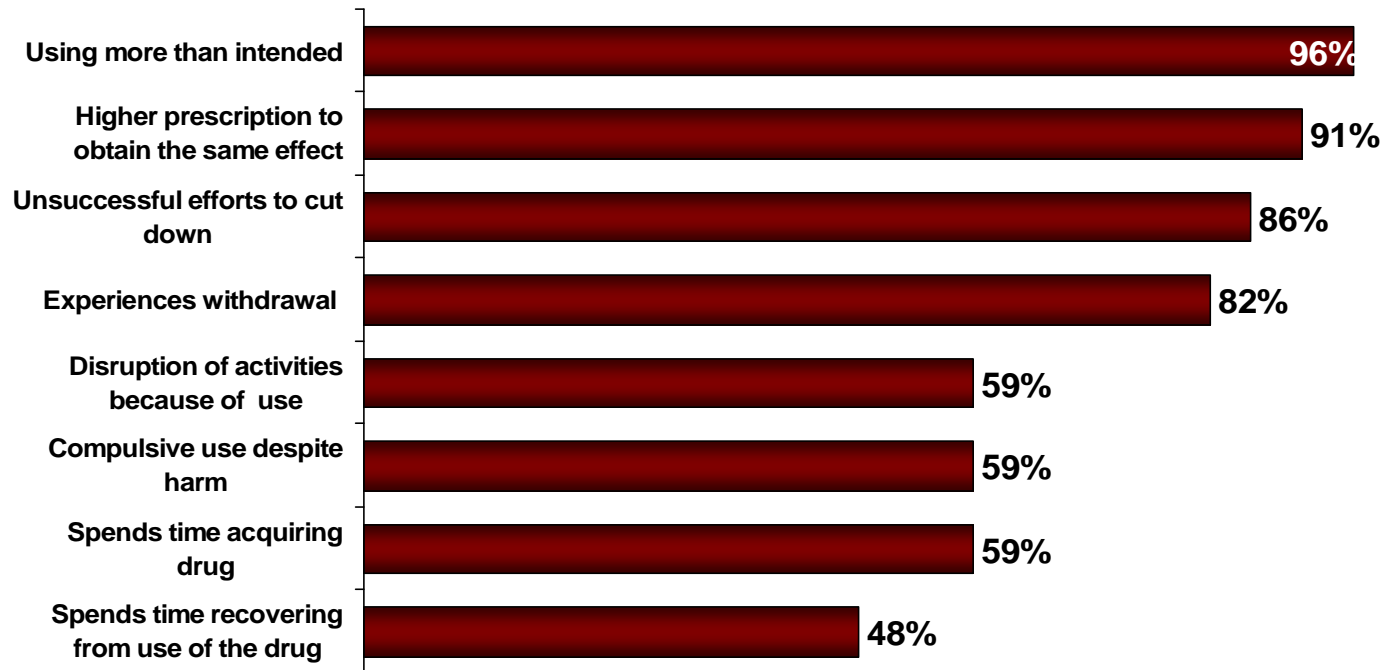
- ▶ Only half of the doctors say that they *always* screen their patients to determine if they may have a predisposition for addiction or dependency when prescribing opioids.
- ▶ The other half saying they do sometimes or never.



Q2) When you prescribe opioids do you screen the patients to determine if they have a predisposition for addiction/dependence?  
Base: Total n= 211

# Most Patients Experience Symptoms due to Opioids

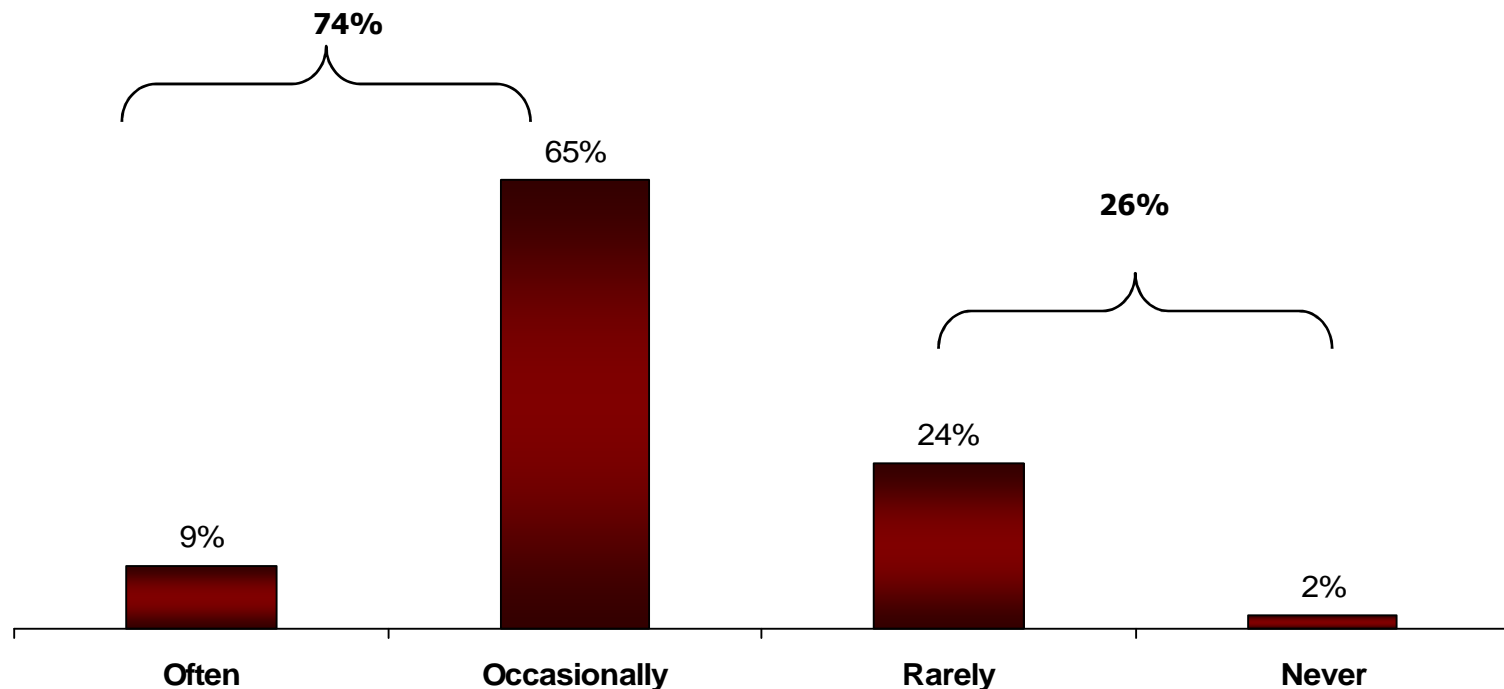
- ▶ Doctors in Ontario say that their patients who are taking opioids are experiencing signs of addictive/ dependent behaviour. The most common symptoms include using more than intended (96%), needing a higher prescriptions to obtain the same effect (91%), being unsuccessful at cutting back (88%) and experiencing withdrawal when not taking any medication (82%).



Q5) Have you ever had a patient who was on opioids who had any of the following symptoms? Base: Total n= 211

# Most Doctors Occasionally Receive Requests for Refills

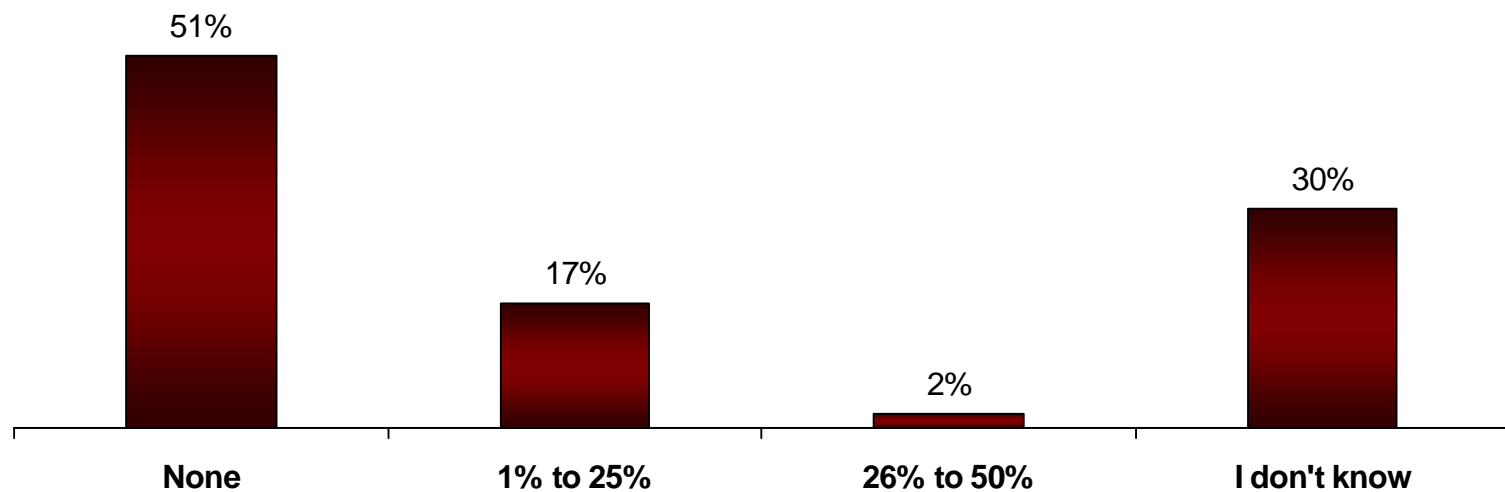
- ▶ Requests for additional medications is common, with 74% of doctors in Ontario *often* or *occasionally* receiving requests for additional opioid prescriptions because their patients have lost their prescriptions or need early refills.
- ▶ Twenty- six percent say they *rarely* or *never* get these requests.



Q3) Do you ever get requests from patients for additional opioid prescriptions because they have lost their prescriptions or need refills early? Base: Total n= 211

## Over Half say Opioid Dependent Patients are Not Dependent on Heroin

- ▶ Over half (51%) of Ontario doctors say that their patients who are prescribed opioids are not dependent on heroin, while 30% are unsure.
- ▶ Seventeen percent of Ontario doctors whose patient's are dependent on opioids and heroin make up 1% to 25%, while 2% of doctors patients make up 26% to 50%.
- ▶ None of the doctors interviewed said that over 50% of their patients are dependent on opioids and heroine.

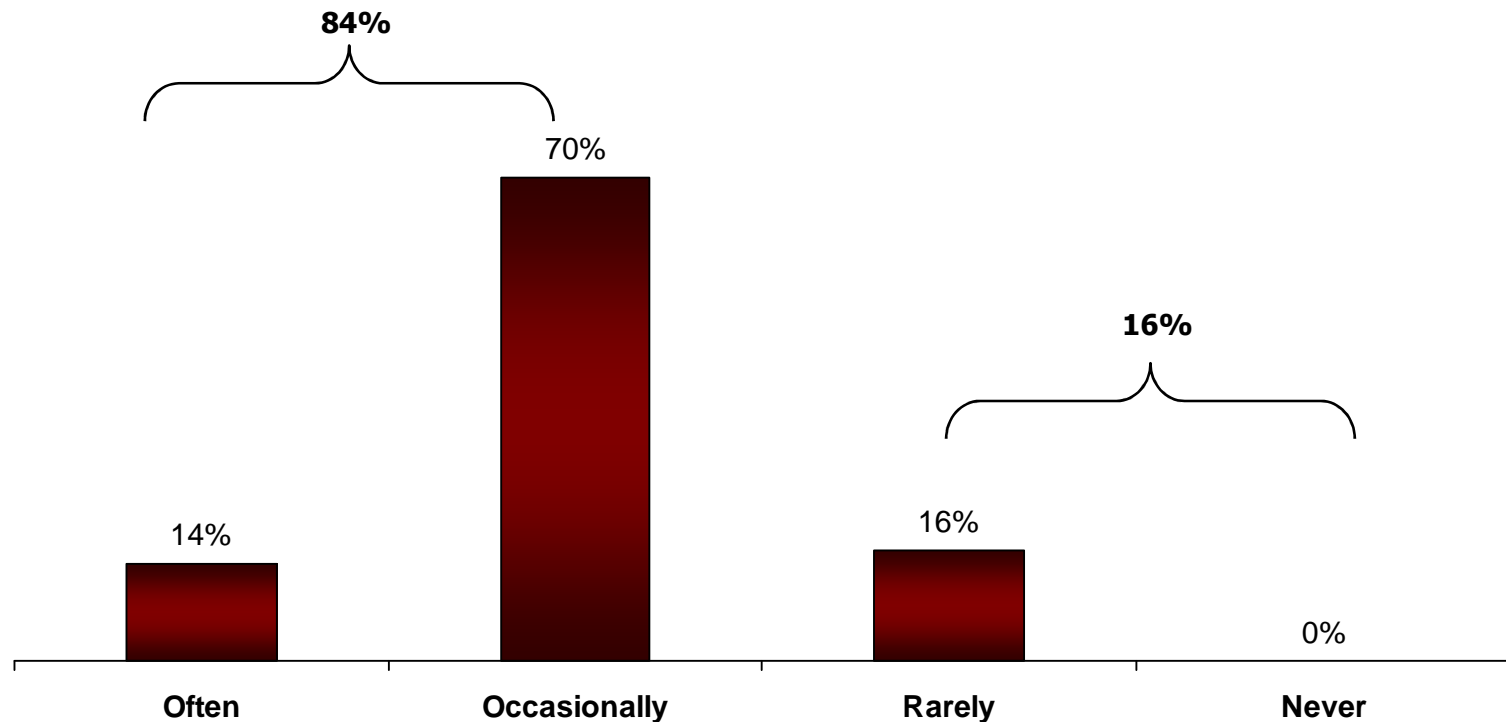


Q7) Approximately what percent of your patients prescribed opioids are also dependent on heroin? Base: Total n= 211

# Treatment Options

## Doctors Occasionally Feel the Need to Intervene

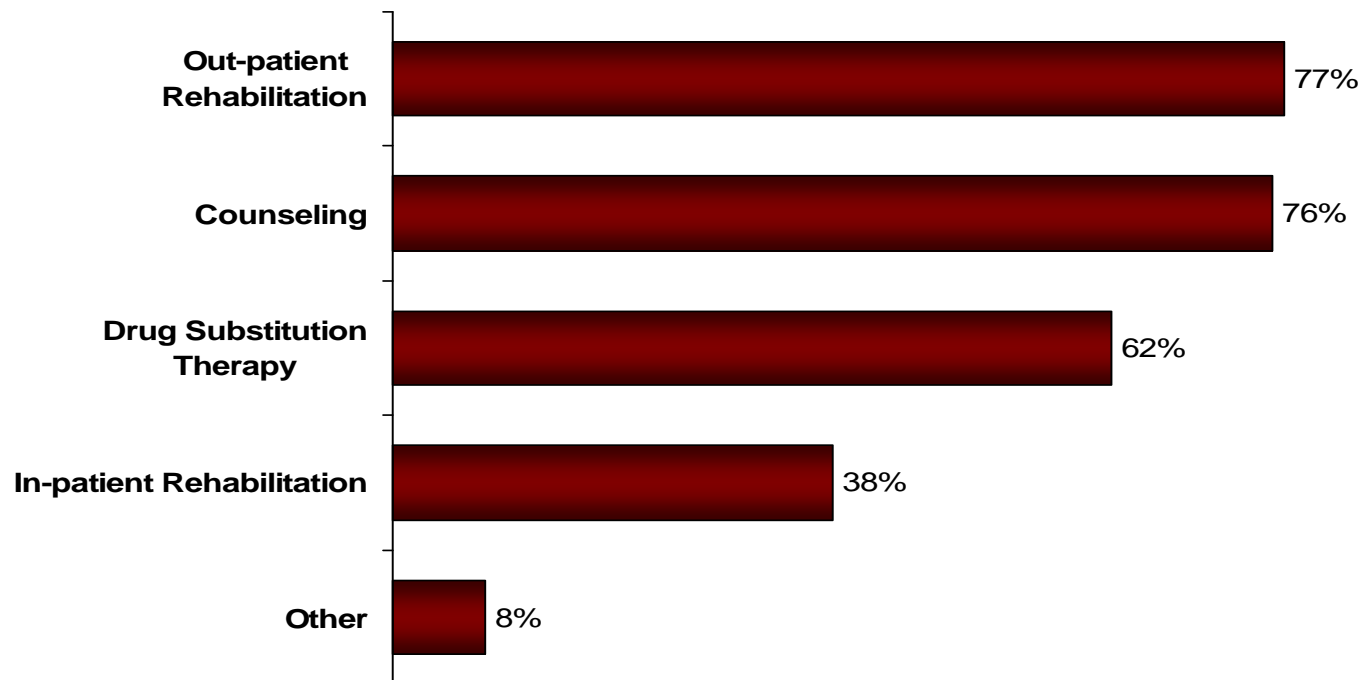
- ▶ While 16% of Ontario doctors *rarely* feel the need to reduce or stop a patient's opioid medication, because they worry they are becoming addicted or dependent, the majority (84%) say they are worried and *often/occasionally* feel the need to intervene.
- ▶ None of them said they never experienced this worry.



Q4) Have you every felt the need to reduce/stop a patient's opioid medication because you were worried that they were becoming addicted/dependent? Base: Total n= 211

## Majority of Doctors Prescribe Treatments to Those Dependent

- ▶ Ninety- five percent of Ontario doctors say they suggest treatments to those addicted/ dependent on prescribed opioids. The most commonly prescribed treatments include out-patient rehabilitation (77%), counseling (76%) and drug substitution therapy (62%).

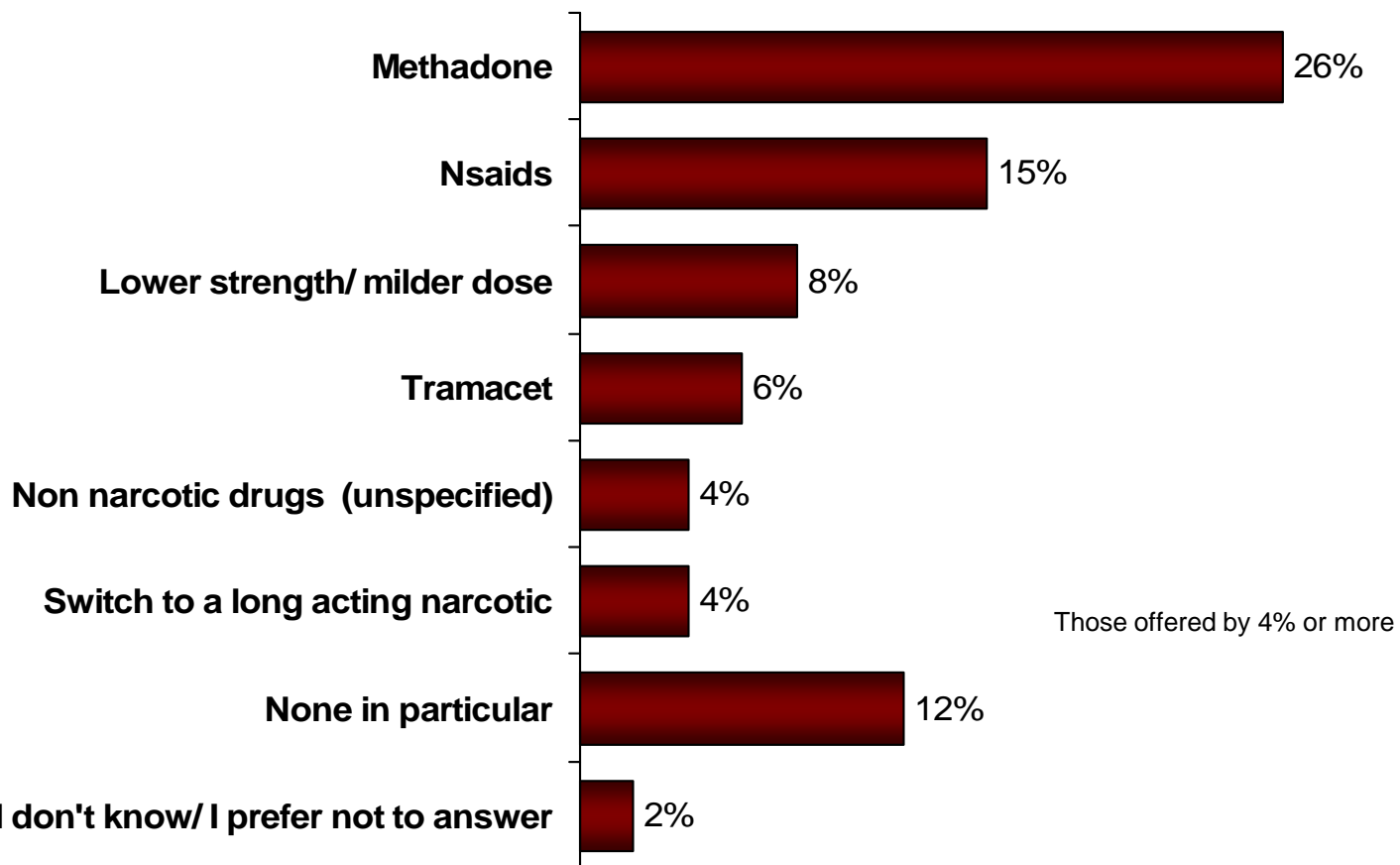


Q6A) Do you suggest treatments to patients addicted/dependent on prescribed opioids? Base: Total n= 211

Q6B) What treatments do you suggest? Base: Those who said "yes" to Q6A n= 201

## Methadone Most Suggested Drug Substitution Therapy

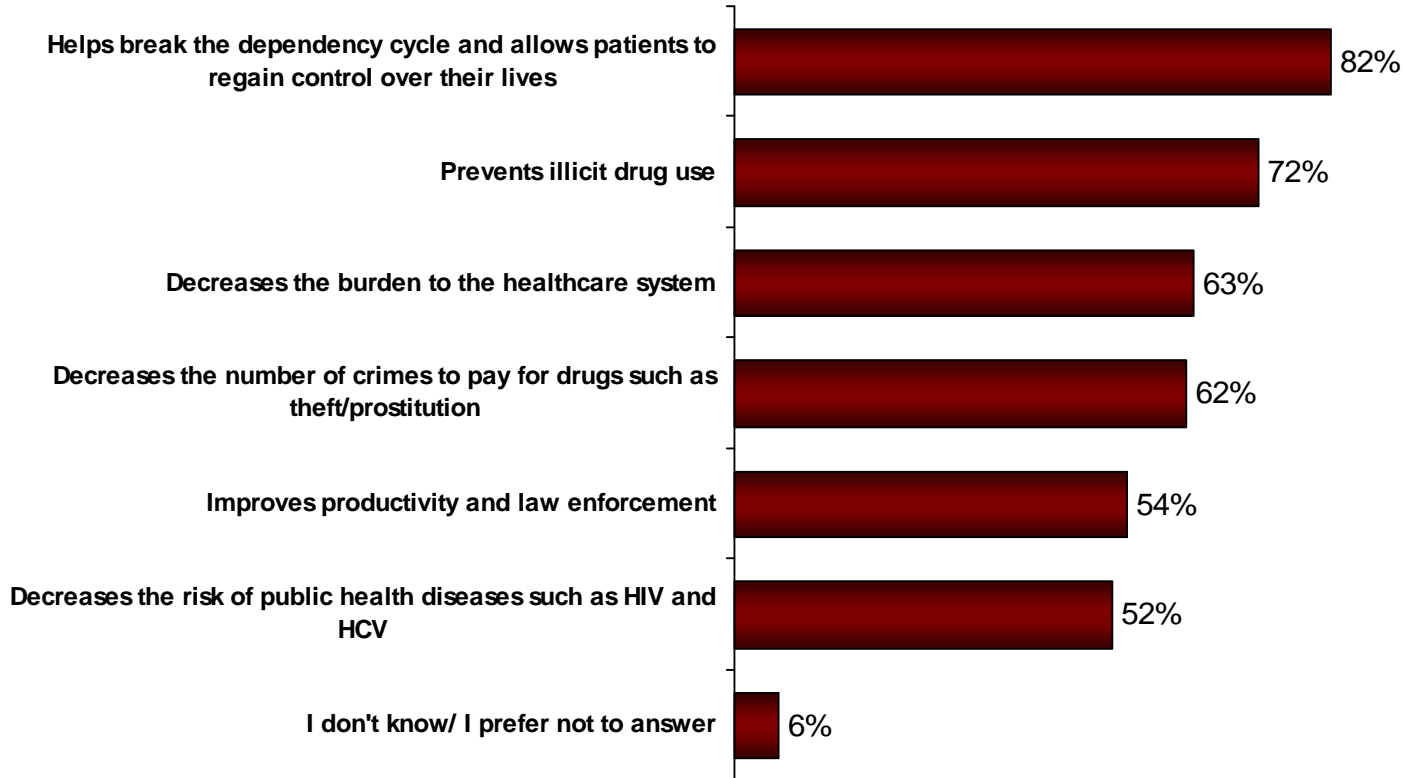
- ▶ Of the 62% of Ontario doctors prescribe some form of drug substitution therapy for those who are addicted/ dependent on opioids, 26% most often suggest Methadone.
- ▶ Some doctors also suggest Nsaids (15%).



Q6C) What drug substitution therapy do you most often suggest? Base: Those who choose 'Drug Substitution Therapy' n= 124

# Doctors Feel that Drug Substitution Therapy is Beneficial

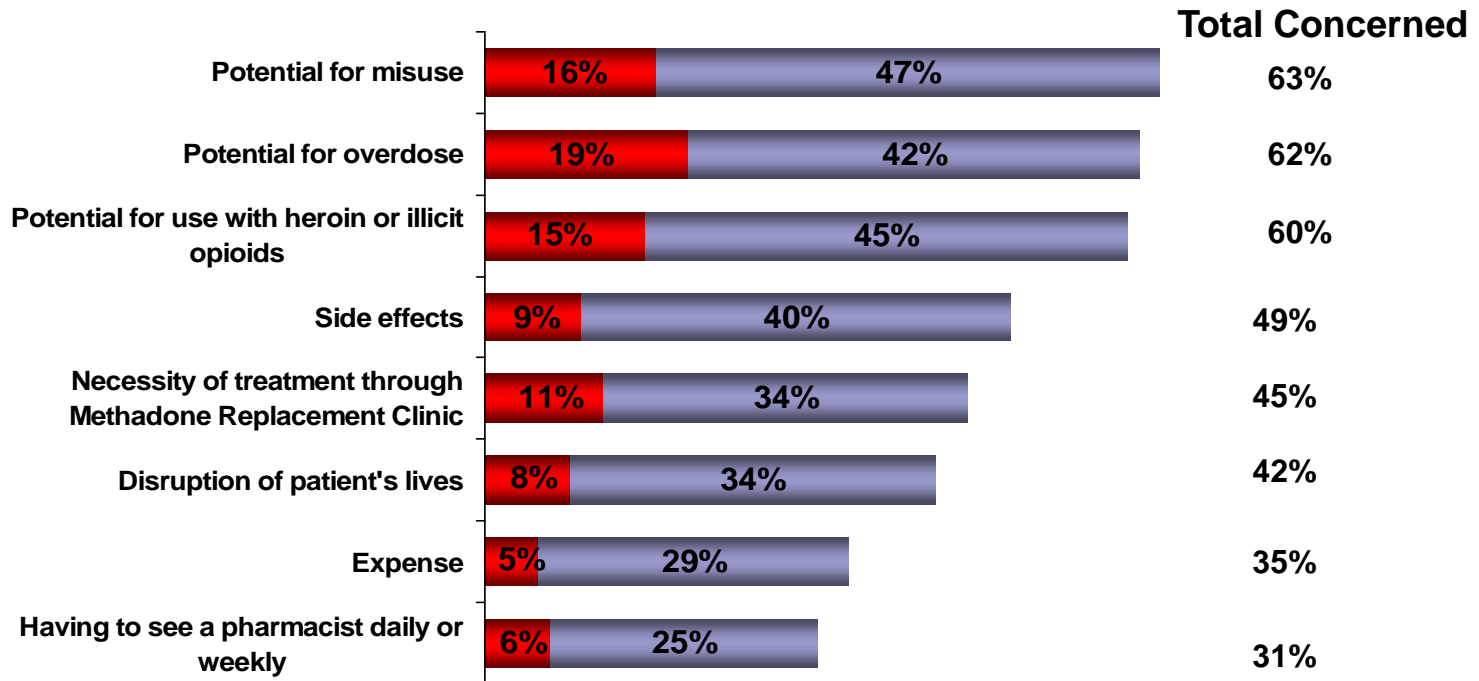
- ▶ Ninety- four percent of Ontario doctor's feel that drug substitution therapy is beneficial in some way, with all reasons tested being mentioned by more than half the sample.



Q8) Which of the following do you consider to be a benefit of drug substitution therapy? Base: Total n= 211

# Ontario Doctors are Concerned when Prescribing Methadone

- ▶ The biggest concern doctor's have with prescribing Methadone Substitution Therapy is the potential for misuse (63%), the potential for overdose (62%) as well as the potential for combining it with heroin or other illicit opioids (60%). However, most doctors only are *somewhat* concerned when prescribing MST.



■ Very Concerned ■ Somewhat Concerned

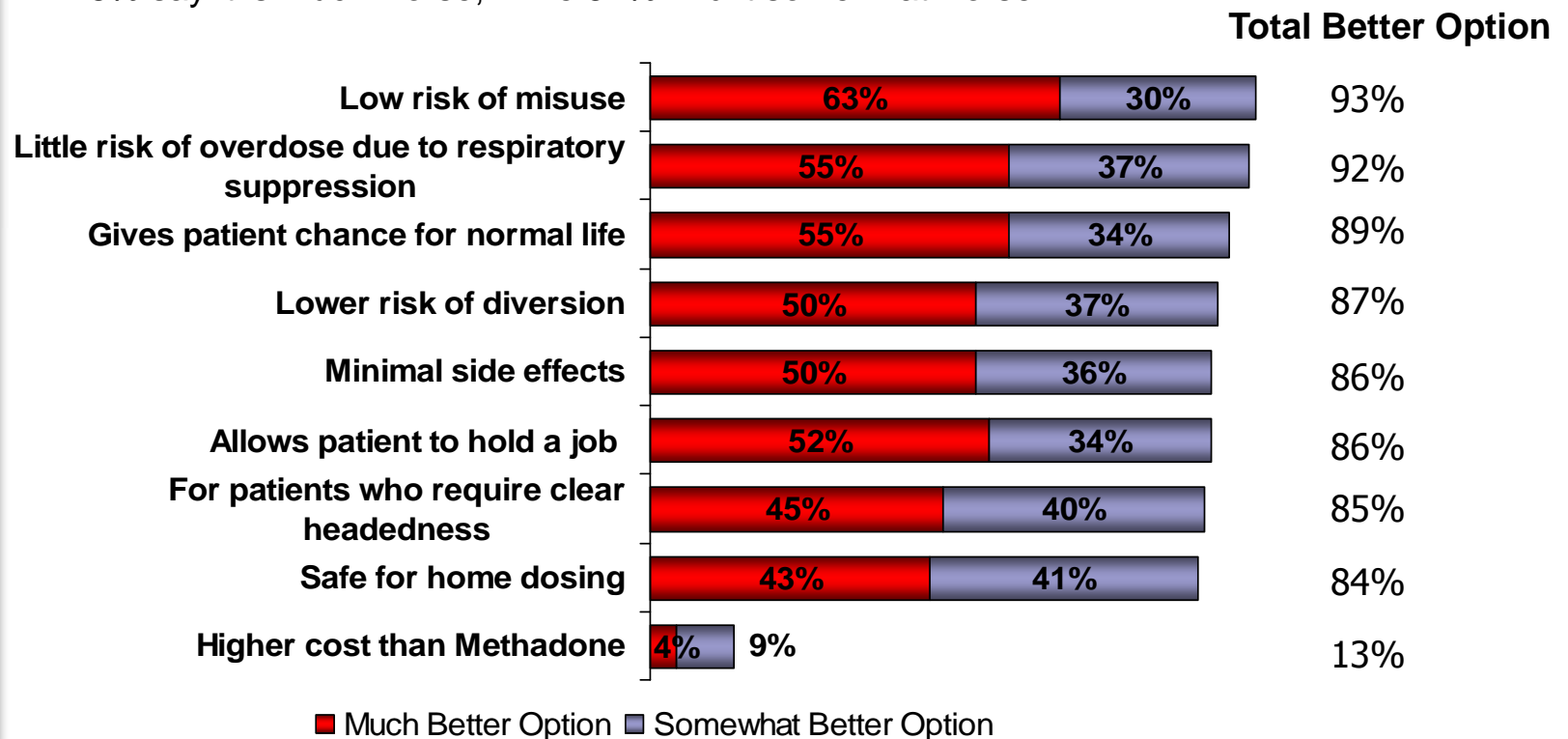
Q9) How concerned are you about each of the following when prescribing Methadone Substitution Therapy to your patients?

Base: Total n= 211

# Suboxone

# Majority Feel New Treatment is Better

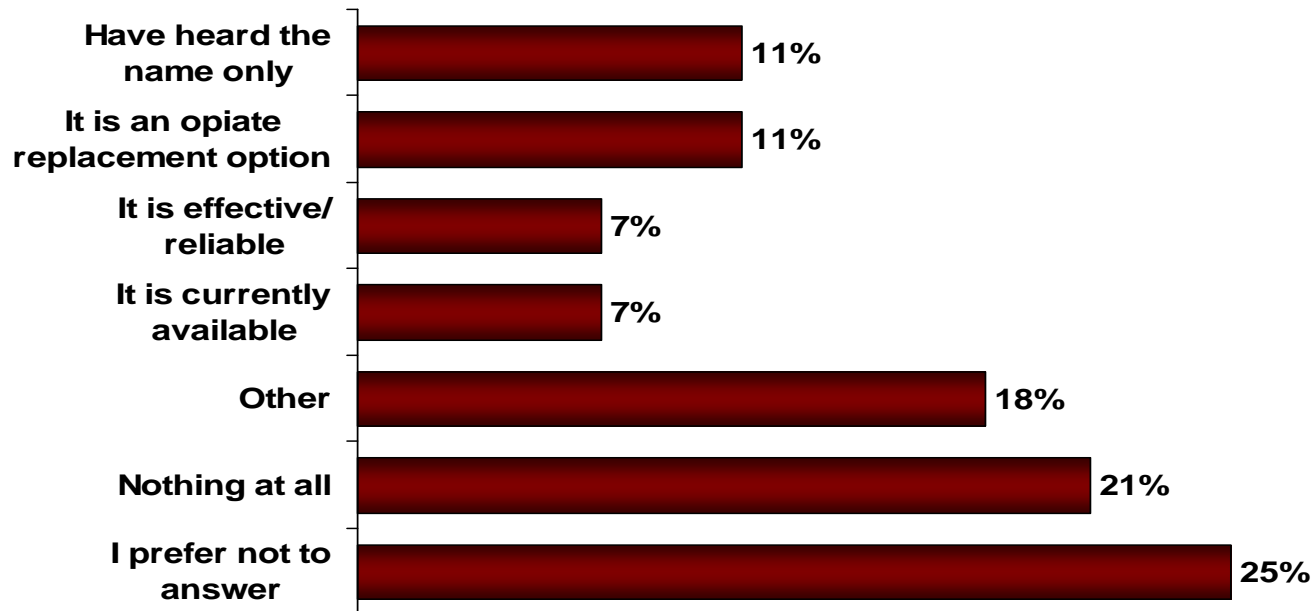
- ▶ When doctors were given a description (see below) of a new drug without being told its name, and compared it to other opioid treatments on the market, they felt that the new drug has many beneficial features.
- ▶ Over half (60%) feel that the higher cost of the new drug is a worse feature, however only 8% say it is much worse, while 52% find it somewhat worse.



Q10) A new treatment option for opioid dependency that suppresses the symptoms of opioid withdrawal and reduces the cravings for opioid drugs is available. The following are features of this treatment. To what degree does each feature make this treatment a better or worse treatment option than what is available now? Base: Total n= 211

## Most Doctors are Unaware of Suboxone

- ▶ While 13% of Ontario doctors are aware of Suboxone, the majority (86%) are unaware.
- ▶ Those who are aware of Suboxone say that they know that it is an opiate replacement option (11%), or have heard of the name (11%), but still do not know much about it, if anything (21%).

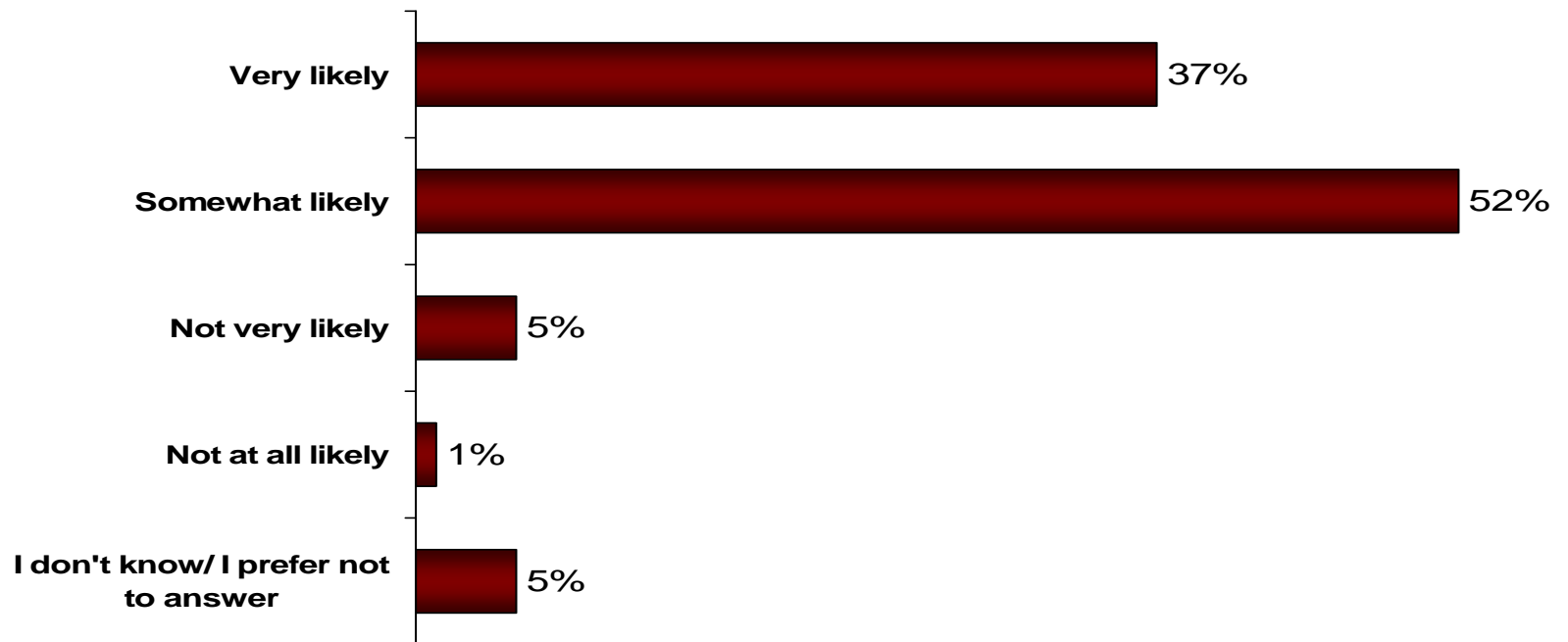


Q11) Are you aware of a new opioid dependency treatment option called Suboxone (buprenorphine/naloxone)? Base: Total n= 211

Q12) What have you heard about Suboxone (buprenorphine/naloxone)? Base: Total n= 28\* CAUTION SMALL BASE SIZE

# Most Would Consider Suboxone for Dependent Patients

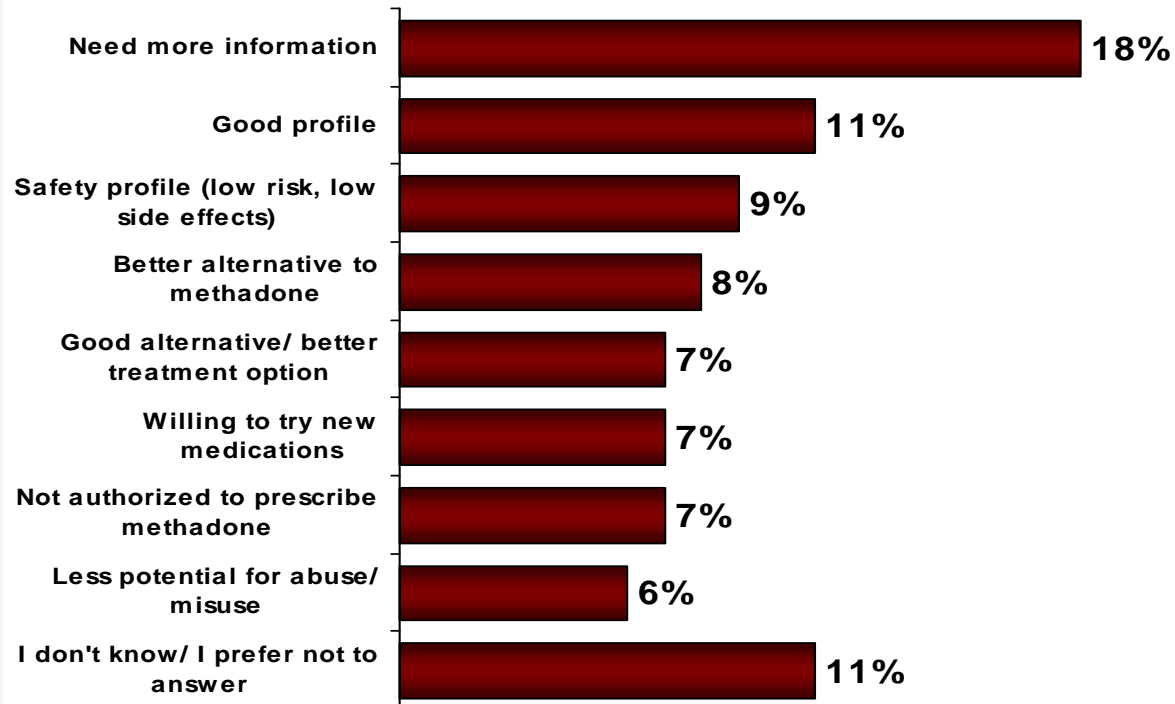
- ▶ While 6% of Ontario doctors are *unlikely* to consider Suboxone to their patients dependent on opioids, and 5% are still *unsure* if they would or not, the majority (89%) of doctors say that they are *likely* to prescribe it to their patients.



Q13A) Suboxone suppresses the symptoms of opioid withdrawal and reduces the cravings for opioid drugs. It has less risk of overdose due to respiratory suppression, is safe for home dosing and allows patients a chance to have a more normal life with minimal side effects. The presence of naloxone which is only active if the drug is misused decreases the chance of misuse and decreases the risk of diversion. How likely would you be to consider Suboxone for patients with a dependency on prescription opioids? Base: Total n= 211

## Some Doctors Want More Information on Suboxone

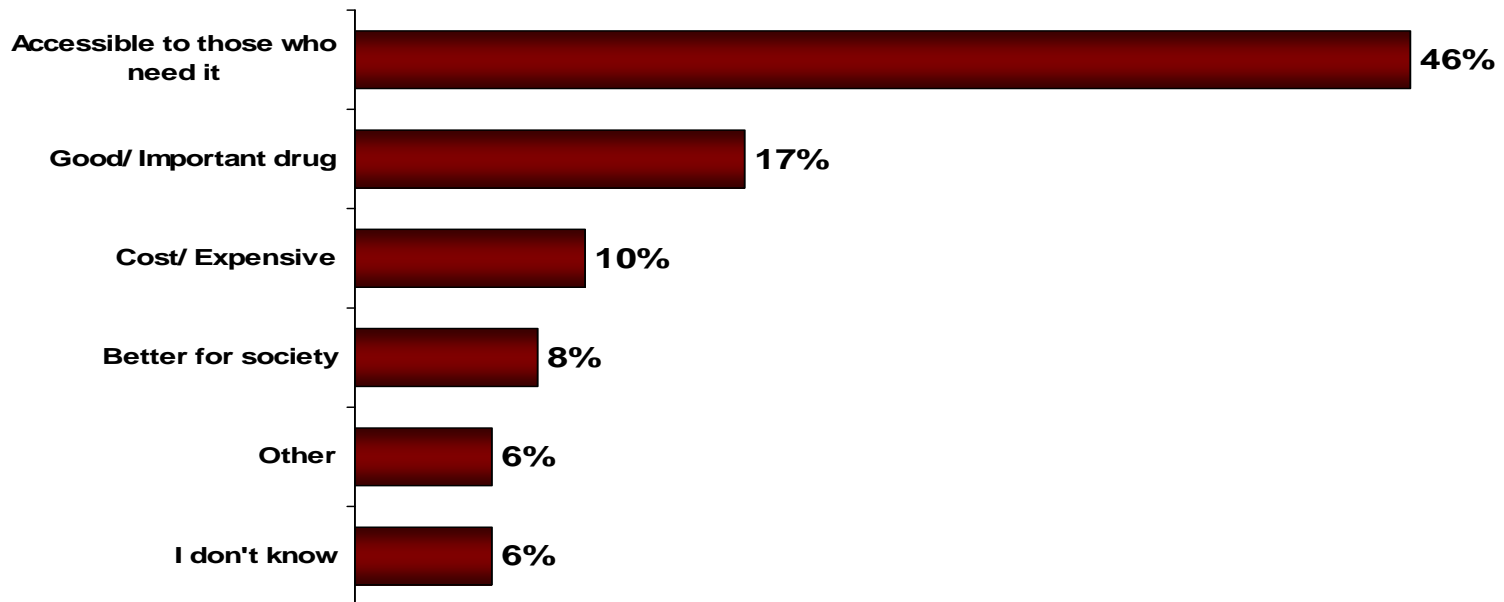
- ▶ Some doctor's feel that while Suboxone has a good profile (11%), has a low risk/ lower side effects (9%) and is safer than other alternative methods, including methadone (8%), doctors still feel that they need more information or experience with the drug (18%) before prescribing it to their patients.



Q13B) Why would you be <Q13A> to consider Suboxone? Base: Those who are likely or unlikely to consider Suboxone n= 200

## Over Half Feel it Should be Covered by ODB

- ▶ While 8% of doctors think that Suboxone shouldn't be covered under ODB, and 27% are unsure, over half (66%) feel that ODB should cover it.
- ▶ Of those who feel that Suboxone should be covered under ODB, feel that while it is a good and important drug (17%), believe it should also be accessible for those who need it (46%), but also realize that it is expensive (10%).



Q14) Suboxone is not available under the Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Formulary. Do you think that Suboxone should be covered?  
Base: Total n= 211

Q15) Why do you feel that way? Base: Those who think that Suboxone should or should not be covered under the ODB n= 155



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