

Changes in naloxone attitudes and provision over the past decade: Findings from the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys and national community pharmacy surveys

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Background: Naloxone is an effective opioid overdose reversal drug. Policy changes over the past decade have resulted in naloxone being available for free without a prescription via participating community pharmacies. However, it is unclear if naloxone provision has changed, and what population-level attitudes towards naloxone are. This study examined trends in public attitudes and naloxone provision among community pharmacies.

Methods: Public attitudes were analysed using data from the 2016, 2019, and 2022-23 National Drug Strategy Household Survey. Trends over time and sociodemographic correlates were examined. Pharmacists' naloxone provision, attitudes, and knowledge were assessed via two national community pharmacy surveys, adopting a randomised representative sampling approach.

Results: In 2022-23, 42% of Australians supported the availability of take-home naloxone, 11% opposed it, 16% were ambivalent, and 31% reported insufficient knowledge to form a view, with support increasing modestly over time. Greater support was observed among those with higher education, those in socioeconomically advantaged areas, major city residents, those speaking English at home, and those reporting recent illicit drug use. Uncertainty was highest among older adults and those who spoke a language other than English at home. Naloxone provision among community pharmacies increased from 23% in 2015 to 73% in 2025. Most pharmacists had positive attitudes (85%) and good/excellent knowledge (81%) of naloxone, with knowledge increasing over time. Key barriers to provision included lack of time (59%) and lack of training (44%).

Conclusions: While support for naloxone has increased modestly over the past decade, considerable uncertainty still remains. Naloxone provision, attitudes, and knowledge among community pharmacists have increased substantially, however gaps remain due to structural and workforce-related barriers.

Implications for Practice and Policy: Strengthening population-level awareness of naloxone, alongside targeted education and support for community pharmacies, is critical to improving equitable access and sustaining overdose prevention efforts.

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