

Opioid agonist therapy doses amongst a sample of people who inject drugs

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Introduction: Opioid agonist treatment (OAT) is the main form of drug treatment for people who inject drugs who experience opioid use disorder. Guidelines recommend dose ranges to ensure effective treatment, while the provision of takeaway doses ensures program flexibility. However, dose ranges for different OAT drugs in Australia have not been regularly published, and policies on takeaway doses vary. In this study, we conducted a preliminary examination of self-reported OAT doses across different OAT drugs amongst a sample of people who inject drugs, including whether participants reported receiving takeaway doses.

Methods: Data were drawn from the 2024 survey of 884 people who regularly inject illicit drugs as part of the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). Median OAT doses were obtained for methadone and oral and injectable buprenorphine preparations. The prevalence of takeaway dose receipt and how it varies by selected correlates was examined in a logistic regression model with the significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Overall, 19% of the sample reported receiving methadone, while 11% received one of the available buprenorphine preparations. The median doses reported by participants were 70mg of methadone, 24mg of oral buprenorphine, 36mg of weekly injectable buprenorphine, and 96mg of monthly injectable buprenorphine. Seventy per cent of those on methadone or oral buprenorphine reported receiving takeaway doses, with no variation by gender or age. Participants in Victoria or Queensland were more likely to report receiving takeaway doses compared to those in New South Wales.

Discussions and Conclusions: The median OAT doses reported were within recommended guidelines, but this masked considerable variation between participants. There is also significant variation in the frequency with which the receipt of takeaway OAT doses is reported in different jurisdictions.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Further work is needed to determine how results relate to specific policies across Australian jurisdictions.

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