

National state of harm reduction: findings from a representative sample of community pharmacies

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Introduction: Drug-related harms are a global public health concern. In Australia, a range of harm reduction strategies have been implemented, particularly in community pharmacies. The current study is part of a larger study to regularly and routinely monitor the national provision of harm reduction services in Australian community pharmacies.

Method: Data were collected via a cross-sectional, anonymous, online survey among a nationally representative sample of community pharmacists. Participants provided information about pharmacy and pharmacist-related characteristics, in addition to a range of harm reduction services offered within the pharmacy.

Results: The sample (n=730) comprised slightly more females (n=387, 53%), with a mean of 15 years of pharmacy practice. Of those who responded, the most common harm reduction services offered were having a return unwanted medicines bin (n=633/636, 100%), staged supply service (n=579/635, 91%), stocking naloxone (n=545/730, 75%), providing a needle and syringe program (n=331/643, 52%) and providing pharmacotherapy (n=318/686, 46%). Compared to a 2015 national community pharmacy survey, increases in naloxone (23% in 2015 vs 74% in 2025) and needle and syringe program (37% in 2015 vs 52% in 2025) service provision were observed. A slight decrease in pharmacotherapy service provision (52% in 2015 vs 46% in 2025) was seen, with 57 pharmacies in 2025 indicating they previously offered pharmacotherapy but no longer do, citing lack of demand from customers (n=34, 60%), inadequate monetary remuneration (n=21 37%) and poor staffing levels (n=18, 32%) as the main reasons for ceasing this service.

Discussions and Conclusions: This is the first national study to comprehensively map a broad range of harm reduction services provided within community pharmacies in Australia. Whilst some services are readily available, and uptake of other services has increased over time, opportunities remain to further support uptake of harm reduction services, with future survey waves planned to monitor progress over time.

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