

## Prescription opioids in Australia 2012–2021: Who was most likely to be dispensed opioids?

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**Introduction:** Pharmaceutical opioids have important clinical applications for pain management, but opioid use may increase risk of harms including overdose. Previous research has indicated that certain groups of people use prescription opioids at higher rates than others, namely older people and women<sup>1</sup>. Recent regulatory changes to opioid prescribing in Australia have aimed to reduce opioid use and harms. Currently, little is known about the impact of these changes on opioid dispensing among specific demographic groups. It is thus timely to examine the characteristics of people who are dispensed opioid scripts in Australia, and changes in rates of dispensing within these groups across time.

**Method:** Using the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) administrative database, we will analyse the demographic characteristics (age group, sex) of patients who received a PBS supply of an opioid medicine between 2012–13 and 2020–21. Other classes of drugs (benzodiazepines, gabapentinoids) will also be examined for changes that occurred in tandem with opioid dispensing trends.

**Results:** Results are expected to identify demographic groups with high rates of opioid dispensing in Australia, and changes to dispensing among these groups between 2012–13 and 2020–21.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** The PBS database is a useful source for identifying particular groups of people with high rates of opioid use, and examining rates of dispensing among these groups over time. Ongoing monitoring of PBS data may help to inform further harm minimisation strategies targeted towards these groups.

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### References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Opioid harm in Australia: and comparisons between Australia and Canada. Canberra: AIHW; 2018 [cited 2022 Apr 13]. 130 p. Cat. No. HSE 210. Available from: [Opioid harm in Australia: and comparisons between Australia and Canada, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-and-publications/summary-reports/summary-report-opioid-harm-in-australia-and-comparisons-between-australia-and-canada)