

MEDIA RELEASE
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Healthcare Atlas highlights growing opioid use

Data released today shows Australia's increasing opioid regulation is not enough to curb rising opioid prescription rates.

Key figures from [The Third Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation](#) (the Atlas):

- The rate of opioid medicines dispensed increased by 5% between 2013 and 2017.
- PBS data shows 15.5 million prescriptions for opioid medicines were filled between 2016 and 2017.
- In 2016 to 2017 there were 58,595 prescriptions dispensed per 100,000 people—that's an increase from 2013 –14, when it was 55,900 prescriptions per 100,000.
- Twice as many people died from overdose associated with an opioid medicine as from an overdose of heroin (2,145 compared with 985) between 2011 and 2015.

"The Atlas highlights the important healthcare trends that require attention – and clearly the rise in opioid medication use is one of those trends. These figures are astonishing, given what we know about the harms associated with opioid use and the limited pain management benefits they provide in the long term," Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett said.

There is growing concern opioids are being prescribed beyond the acute pain period and for chronic non-cancer pain, despite little evidence to show any benefit to long term use when dealing with chronic pain conditions.

The last few years have seen multiple attempts to reduce opioid related harm, but clearly more needs to be done.

"We need better awareness among consumers and doctors about pain management treatment options – and we need to ensure those options exist" Ms Bennett said. "Where pain medication is prescribed, people living with pain will also benefit from a multidisciplinary approach to their care, such as a physiotherapist, psychologist, occupational therapist or other allied health services. However, there are significant barriers for most people to access this level of care; one is the cost and the other is geographical location with allied health notoriously scarce in regional areas."

Painaustralia was funded by the Federal Government to create a National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management, which is currently being reviewed by the Federal Government.

"It is time we respond with effective solutions to the pain epidemic that is fuelling this rise in opioid medications if we are serious about reversing this upward trend. We hope that the National Strategic Action Plan provides the blueprint for this response – it can't come soon enough," Ms Bennett concluded.

Media contact: Jessica Conway, Painaustralia Media Manager
Phone: 0421 288 439
Email: jessica.conway@pinaustralia.org.au