



Harm minimisation – the background

In Australia, the use and misuse of licit and illicit drugs is recognised as a major health problem, with social and economic impacts to the individual and the wider community. From the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2016), 8.5 million people, aged 14 years and over, had illicitly used a drug at some point in their life time.

The community pharmacy network is a recognised contributor to Australia's harm minimisation efforts. This includes the provision of services that are specifically aimed at reducing the adverse health, social, and economic consequences attributed to drug use. These services include needle and syringe exchange programs, and the dispensing of opioid substitution therapy. It is well recognised that the provision of treatment services for people who are drug dependent, can have a significant impact on preventing drug related harm.

Opioid substitution therapy – how is community pharmacy involved?

In 2015-16, nearly 9 in 10 (87%) of dosing point sites in Australia were located in community pharmacies. Focussing on NSW, this service is provided by over 700 community pharmacies across the state in various locations. It has been acknowledged by pharmacotherapy clients, that the community pharmacy environment is seen as a "normal space" for where they are able to receive their doses. Whilst the sector is involved in this important public health initiative to an extent, there is a continuing opportunity to increase access to this service through greater involvement by members of the community pharmacy network.

What are the types of pharmacotherapy provided?

The current pharmacotherapies recommended for the treatment of opioid dependency include:

- Methadone
- Buprenorphine
- Buprenorphine/naloxone

As Schedule 8 medications, pharmacists should be aware of, and comply with, the relevant legislation in relation to dispensing and supply.

Community pharmacists should also be aware of the NSW clinical guidelines in relation to the use of methadone and buprenorphine for the treatment of opioid dependence. Familiarity with the guidelines is important, as community pharmacists have an important role in monitoring and supporting compliance with these guidelines.

How do I get involved?

In NSW, it is a two-step process for community pharmacies seeking to be involved in the NSW Opioid Treatment Program through the provision of pharmacotherapy.

To start, NSW community pharmacies will need to register, and be approved by, the NSW Ministry of Health as a recognised dosing point to supply methadone and/or buprenorphine. Following this, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia (NSW Branch) will contact your pharmacy to help you enrol in the Pharmacy Incentive Scheme.

For more information, please contact the Guild's NSW Branch on (02) 9467 7100 or email: healthservices@nsw.guild.org.au

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: detailed findings. Drug Statistics series no. 31. Cat. no. PHE 214. Canberra: AIHW.
2. International Pharmaceutical Federation. Reducing harm associated with drugs of abuse: The role of pharmacists. The Hague, the Netherlands: International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2017.
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data Collection 2016. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services/national-opioid-pharmacotherapy-statistics-nopsad-2016/report-editions> [Viewed 21 February 2018]
4. NSW Health 2006. NSW Opioid Treatment Program: Community Pharmacy Dosing Point Protocol. Accessed from: <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pharmaceutical/Documents/OTP-protocol-pharmacists.pdf>

