

# MI-CRE 2023 Annual Research Symposium and Policy Forum

## *National trends in the use of medicines for opioid agonist treatment, 2013-2022*

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### **Abstract**

**Background and Aims:** There are limited longitudinal data on national patterns of opioid agonist treatment (OAT). This study describes 10-year trends in the sales of OAT medicines in Australia.

**Design and Methods:** A descriptive and time-series analysis of methadone, sublingual (SL) buprenorphine (+/- naloxone), and long-acting injectable (LAI) buprenorphine sold in Australia between 2013 and 2022 was performed. Total units sold were used to estimate the number of clients accessing OAT per month, based on average doses. Absolute counts of clients and rates per 10,000 population were estimated per month, overall and by formulation, jurisdiction, remoteness, and setting.

**Results:** Between January 2013 and December 2022, the estimated number of clients on: any OAT increased by 41% to 52,345, methadone decreased (-8.5%), SL buprenorphine increased (+78%), and LAI buprenorphine increased substantially after September 2019. In January 2013, 78% of OAT clients received methadone. By December 2022, 48% received methadone, 26% SL buprenorphine, and 26% LAI buprenorphine. Between 2013 to 2022, OAT clients per capita per month were highest in NSW, ACT and VIC, and lowest in NT and WA. Over the study period, greater increases in per-capita OAT use were observed in very remote areas (+78%) compared to major cities (+31%). The number of clients accessing OAT in non-community pharmacy settings remained stable from 2013 to 2019/20, before increasing markedly. The introduction of LAI buprenorphine was associated with an immediate-sustained increase of 1636 OAT clients, and further increases of 190 OAT clients/month.

**Conclusions:** Patterns of OAT have shifted over the last 10-years with buprenorphine (SL/LAI) now the most common OAT used in Australia. The introduction of LAI buprenorphine has expanded OAT access, particularly in non-community pharmacy settings, and in remote areas.

**Impact:** Understanding the real-world utilisation of OAT among people with opioid dependence is critical to support ongoing access to OAT.