

People dispensed a strong opioid for 6 or more weeks

Technical information	
Indicator name (short)	People dispensed a strong opioid for 6 or more weeks, rate per 1,000.
Description	This measure details the rate of people dispensed a strong opioid for 6 or more weeks per 1,000 population.
Rationale	The IHI classes opioids as one of four groups of medicines (along with anticoagulants, insulin, and sedatives) that can cause harm to patients, even when used as intended. Except circumstances, strong opioids are intended for short-term use only, with use for 6 weeks or more raising questions of appropriateness.
Numerator	The number of people dispensed a strong opioid for 6–12 weeks after the first dispensing.
Denominator	Stats NZ resident population.
Inclusions	- Medication: 1274 fentanyl citrate; 1795 methadone hydrochloride; 1830 morphine hydrochloride; 1831 morphine sulphate; 2383 morphine tartrate; 3801 fentanyl; 3822 oxycodone hydrochloride; 3896 fentanyl citrate; 1953 pethidine hydrochloride. - Date between first dispensing in a year and any subsequent dispensing to be greater than or equal to 6 weeks and not more than 12 weeks. - Only dispensings in the same calendar year were included. The year was truncated at mid-November, ie, first dispensings from mid-November to 31 December were excluded as they would not meet the criteria of a subsequent dispensing 6–12 weeks after the first.
Exclusions	- Opioid substitution treatment excludes by identifying people dispensed methadone every first, second or third day. - Methadone for opioid substitution treatment was excluded from this indicator by removing records dispensed methadone within three days of the previous dispensing.
Note for calculation	Unit of measure: Rate Adjustment applied: None District health board (DHB) assignment: Domicile
Data sources	Pharmaceutical Collection, Ministry of Health. National population projections, Stats NZ.
Suppression rule	Data is not presented where the denominator was less than 10.

Notes

Note: A strong opioid is one that is classed as step 3 of the WHO analgesic ladder. In New Zealand the following strong opioids are subsidised: fentanyl, methadone, morphine, oxycodone and pethidine. *See appendix for more details.*

Appendix 1. Interpretation notes

Standard deviation

Data is presented as standard deviation from the mean.

Standard deviation is a statistical measure of variation from a mean. Assuming that recorded instances are normally distributed (ie, they are in the usual 'bell-shaped curve'), 68 percent of all recorded instances would be expected to be within one standard deviation either side of the mean and 95 percent within two standard deviations. The two 'middle' shades will be within one standard deviation of the mean.

Confidence intervals

Data for each DHB is presented as rate per 1,000 population. Upper and lower confidence intervals were calculated to 95 percent level of confidence.

Calculating magnitude of variation

When reporting the size of variation between DHBs to prevent either low or high outliers having a large effect on the reported ratio, the top and/or bottom DHBs are excluded to avoid overstating the variation.

Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government