

## Background

- The increasing number of fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses is a major public health concern in Ontario.
- Naloxone is a life-saving medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose.
- Since June 2016, naloxone was made freely available in participating pharmacies through the Ontario Naloxone Program for Pharmacies (ONPP). This program pays for community pharmacies to distribute naloxone kits to all Ontarians who are at risk of an opioid-related overdose or who may witness an overdose.

## What were we investigating?

The uptake of naloxone through the ONPP as well as the characteristics of individuals receiving and pharmacies distributing naloxone kits.

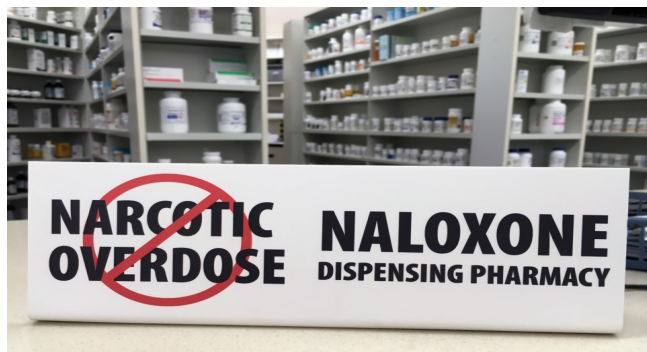
## How was the study conducted?

We conducted a population-based study of all Ontario residents who received a naloxone kit through the ONPP between July 1, 2016 and March 31, 2018. This included:

1. An analysis of monthly rates of naloxone kits dispensed over time.
2. A descriptive analysis of all individuals and pharmacies who accessed and dispensed naloxone, respectively. We stratified individuals according to their opioid exposure: prescription opioid agonist therapy (OAT) recipients, prescription opioid recipients, those who were previously exposed to an opioid, and those with no/unknown opioid exposure.
3. A comparison of the total proportion of naloxone kits dispensed to the total proportion of naloxone-dispensing pharmacies.

## What did we find?

- A total of 2,729 community pharmacies dispensed 91,069 naloxone kits to 67,910 individuals.
- Naloxone dispensing through the ONPP increased from 1.9 to 54.3 kits per 100,000 residents between July 2016 and March 2018.
- Uptake of naloxone was highest among individuals who received OAT (40.7% of OAT recipients received at least one kit). Comparatively, a naloxone kit was received by 1.6% of prescription opioid recipients, 1.0% of individuals with a past opioid exposure, and 0.3% of individuals with no/unknown opioid exposure.
- Naloxone dispensing was highly clustered among pharmacies (Gini coefficient 0.78; 95% confidence interval, 0.73 - 0.83) with 55.6% of Ontario pharmacies dispensing naloxone, and 33.7% of kits dispensed by the top 1.0% of naloxone dispensing pharmacies.



## Key points

- A total of 91,069 naloxone kits were dispensed in the first 21 months of the ONPP to 67,910 individuals.
- The majority of people who received a naloxone kit through the ONPP were individuals receiving OAT. There was low uptake among individuals who received a prescription opioid even though some of these individuals may be at risk of experiencing an overdose.
- More than half of all naloxone kits were distributed to people with no or unknown opioid exposure. These are likely family members or friends of individuals who are at risk of an opioid overdose.
- Only half of Ontario pharmacies participated in the ONPP, suggesting that individuals may have difficulty accessing naloxone kits through the program.

## Recommendations

### Citizens

If you, or someone you know, is taking a high daily dose of a prescription opioid or may be at risk of an opioid overdose, speak to your local pharmacist about how to access and administer take-home naloxone.

### Healthcare Professionals

Where possible, pharmacists should try to identify individuals who are at risk of an opioid overdose to offer harm reduction interventions such as take-home naloxone.

### Policymakers

Efforts are needed to increase naloxone uptake among individuals who are at greatest risk of an opioid overdose. Further opportunities for expanding pharmacy participation should be identified and pursued.