

Ontario Prescription Opioid Tool: Quarterly Update

COVID-19 INSIGHTS

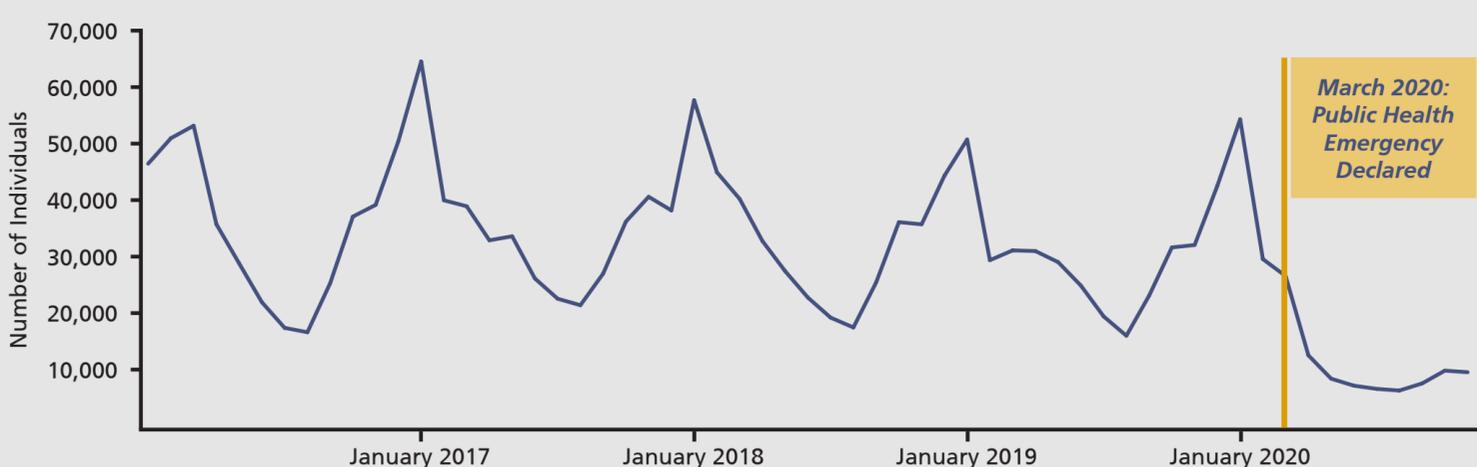
Indicators of Opioid Prescribing in Ontario Amid COVID-19

The **Ontario Prescription Opioid Tool** is updated quarterly and provides data related to indicators for **opioid prescribing in Ontario** from 2012 onwards, as well as estimates of **publicly-funded naloxone kits dispensed from pharmacies**. The tool has now been updated to include data up to November 2020 (January 2021 for naloxone).

Ontario has reported **increasing opioid-related overdoses during the COVID-19 pandemic**. Below, we explore the effects of COVID-19 on opioid prescribing indicators and the distribution of naloxone in the province.

Please note: these findings are meant to provide a preliminary indication of changing trends during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ODPRN will continue to release quarterly updates to determine the degree to which these changes persist over time.

Opioids for Cough



Opioid use for cough has declined during COVID-19. This is likely because COVID-19 prevention measures have been effective against cold and flu viruses. These include:



Washing hands and disinfecting commonly used surfaces



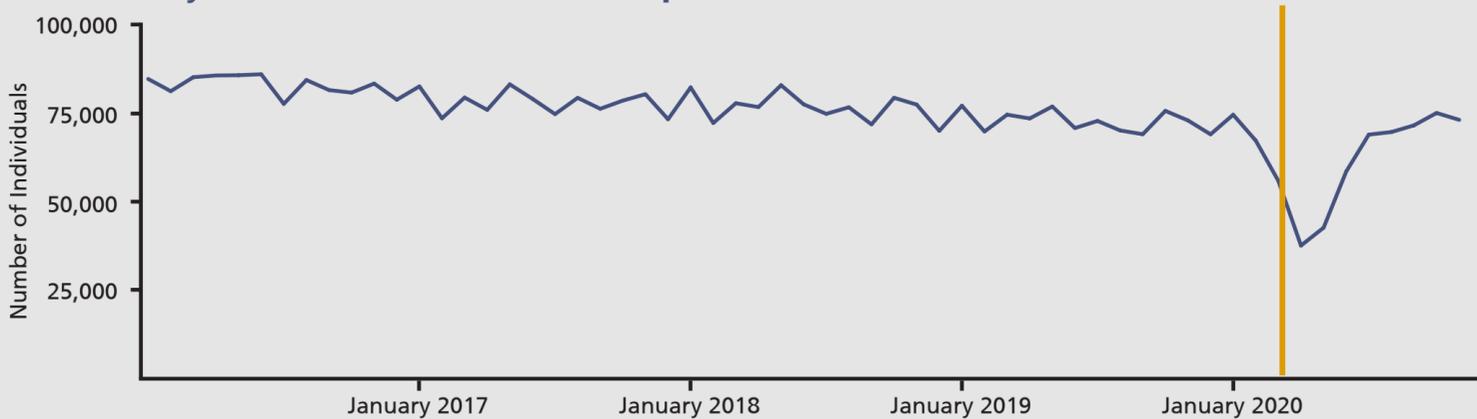
Staying home and keeping social circles small



Wearing a mask and keeping distance from others

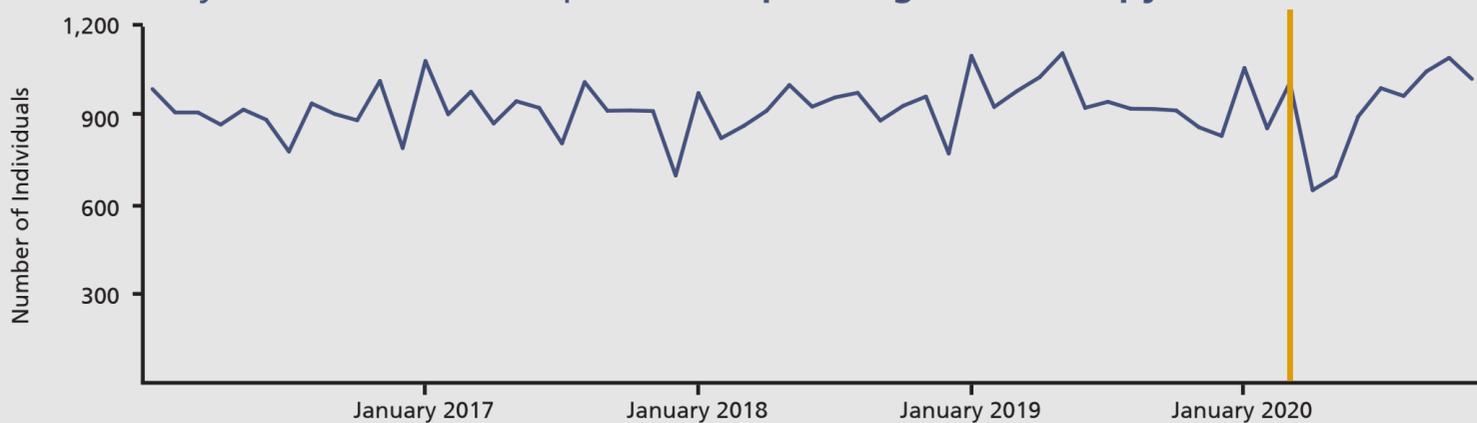
Reversal of Early Trends

Monthly Count of New Users of Opioids for Pain in Ontario



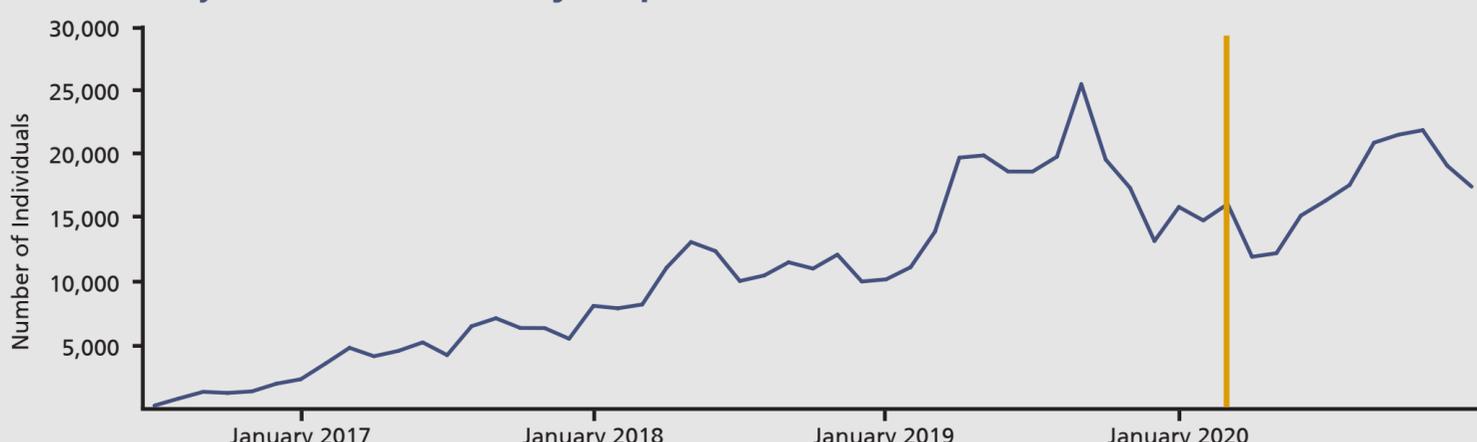
The monthly number of new users of opioids for pain declined during the early months of the pandemic, possibly due to fewer surgeries, emergency department and walk-in clinic visits, and dental procedures. Since April 2020, this trend has reversed, which is likely due to the resumption of some healthcare services and increased virtual services. Similar trends were observed in overall rates of opioid use for pain.

Monthly Count of New Recipients of Opioid Agonist Therapy in Ontario



In April 2020, the fewest number of people newly initiated opioid agonist therapy (OAT) since December 2013. This trend has since reversed, reaching 1132 new OAT recipients in October 2020, the second highest monthly number of new recipients since July 2013.

Monthly Count of Pharmacy Dispensed Naloxone Kits in Ontario



A major concern during the pandemic has been the spike in overdose deaths attributed to the increasingly toxic unregulated drug supply and reduced access to harm reduction services. This concern was exacerbated by an initial decline in naloxone dispensing in April and May 2020. Dispensing of naloxone has again increased, however as overdose deaths continue to climb, improved access to naloxone and additional evidence informed action is needed to address the crisis.