

# COVID-19 restrictions and the incidence and prevalence of prescription opioid use in Australia – a nation-wide study

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted seeking and delivery of healthcare. Different Australian jurisdictions implemented different COVID-19 restrictions. We used Australian national pharmacy dispensing data to conduct interrupted time series analyses to examine the incidence and prevalence of opioid dispensing in different jurisdictions. Following nationwide COVID-19 restrictions, the opioid incidence dropped by -0.40 [-0.50, -0.31], -0.33 [-0.46, -0.21] and -0.21 [-0.37, -0.04] /1000 people/week and prevalence dropped by -0.85 [-1.39, -0.31], -0.54 [-1.01, -0.07] and -0.62 [-0.99, -0.25] /1000 people/week in Victoria, New South Wales and other jurisdictions, respectively. Incidence and prevalence increased by 0.29 [0.13, 0.44] and 0.72 [0.11, 1.33] /1000 people/week, respectively in Victoria post-lockdown; no significant changes were observed in other jurisdictions. No significant changes were observed in the initiation of long-term opioid use in any jurisdictions. More stringent restrictions coincided with more pronounced reductions in overall opioid initiation, but initiation of long-term opioid use did not change.

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Figure 1. Weekly count of people initiating and using opioids per 1000 people

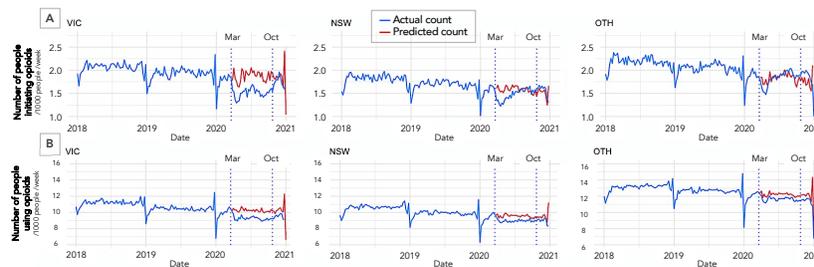


Figure 2. Weekly proportion of people initiating on long-term opioid use

