

DATA BRIEF: NALOXONE PRESCRIPTION IN RESPONSE TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

JULY 2021

A Profile of Naloxone Prescribing Practices in Arkansas

In response to the opioid epidemic, policies to expand access to the overdose-reversal drug naloxone — such as allowing pharmacists to dispense naloxone without a prescription or mandating naloxone and opioid co-prescriptions — have emerged across the country. In Arkansas, ACT 651 of 2021, which goes into effect on July 28, 2021, requires a co-prescription of naloxone in certain situations. These situations include when the dosage for an opioid prescription is ≥ 50 morphine milligram equivalents (MME) per day, a benzodiazepine has been prescribed previously or will be prescribed at the same time as an opioid, or an individual has a history of opioid use disorder or drug overdose. In 2017, licensed pharmacists became authorized to order, dispense, and administer naloxone to individuals without a prescription under Arkansas's standing naloxone protocol.

To inform and understand the trends and patterns of naloxone prescriptions in Arkansas, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement analyzed the naloxone and opioid prescriptions for Medicaid and commercially insured beneficiaries from state fiscal year (FY) 2017 to FY 2020 using data from the Arkansas All-Payer Claims Database, part of the Arkansas Healthcare Transparency Initiative. Opioid doses of ≥ 50 MME per day or ≥ 90 MME per day were categorized as high-dose opioid prescriptions, consistent with the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain*.

Key Findings

- Among Medicaid and commercially insured beneficiaries, the number of individuals receiving opioid prescriptions decreased from FY 2017 to FY 2020, while the number of individuals receiving naloxone prescriptions increased.
- The percentages of individuals who received both naloxone and high-dose opioid prescriptions increased each state fiscal year, from 0.05% for individuals with ≥ 50 MME per day opioid prescriptions and 0.11% for individuals with ≥ 90 MME per day opioid prescriptions in FY 2017 to 4.6% and 7.2% in FY 2020, respectively. However, the percentages continue to be low.
- In FY 2020, one naloxone prescription was dispensed for every 22 individuals with ≥ 50 MME per day opioid prescriptions, and one naloxone prescription was dispensed for every 14 individuals with ≥ 90 MME per day opioid prescriptions. This is an improvement from 34 individuals and 19 individuals, respectively, per naloxone prescription dispensed in FY 2019.
- In FY 2020, pharmacists authorized 2,020 out of 4,448 naloxone prescriptions under state protocol, or 45.4%. This is an increase from 36.0% in FY 2019.

INDIVIDUALS WITH OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS BY AMOUNT AND ANNUAL PERCENTAGE CHANGE, FY 2017 to 2020

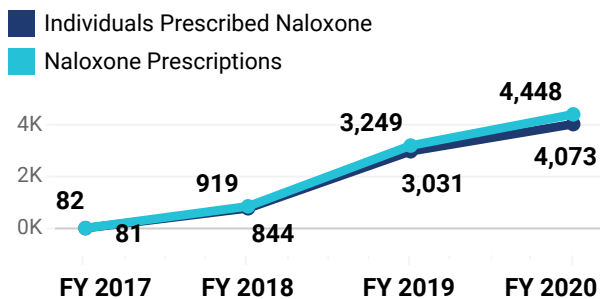
	All Opioid Doses	≥ 50 MME per Day	≥ 90 MME per Day
FY 2017	379,687	124,747	47,453
FY 2018	317,429 (-16.4%)	90,693 (-27.3%)	32,276 (-32.0%)
FY 2019	266,556 (-16.0%)	54,024 (-40.4%)	19,989 (-38.1%)
FY 2020	235,351 (-11.7%)	44,702 (-17.3%)	17,905 (-10.4%)

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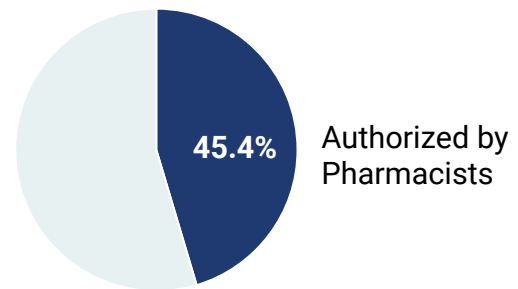
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From FY 2019 to FY 2020, there was a 36.9% increase in naloxone prescriptions and a 34.4% increase in individuals who received naloxone prescriptions. Forty-five percent of naloxone prescriptions were authorized by pharmacists under state protocol in FY 2020.

NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS

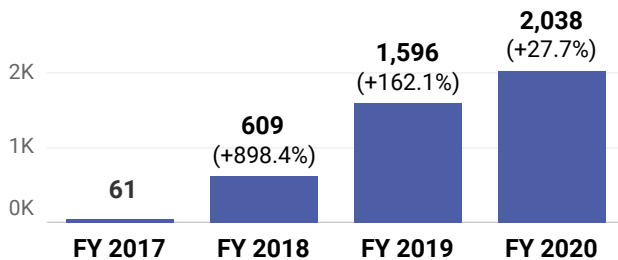


FY 2020 PERCENTAGE OF NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS AUTHORIZED BY PHARMACISTS UNDER STATE PROTOCOL

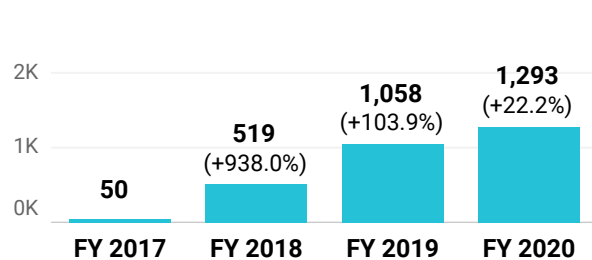


Each state fiscal year, the number of individuals who received both high-dose opioid and naloxone prescriptions increased. From FY 2019 to FY 2020, the number of individuals increased by 27.7% among those with opioid prescriptions of ≥ 50 MME per day and by 22.2% among those with opioid prescriptions of ≥ 90 MME per day.

INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED ≥ 50 MME PER DAY OPIOID AND NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS

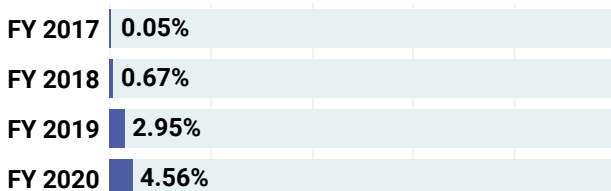


INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED ≥ 90 MME PER DAY OPIOID AND NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS



Although the percentages of individuals who received both high-dose opioid and naloxone prescriptions increased each year, the percentages remained low in FY 2020 at 4.6% for individuals with opioid prescriptions of ≥ 50 MME per day and 7.2% among individuals with ≥ 90 MME per day.

PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED ≥ 50 MME PER DAY OPIOID AND NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS



PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED ≥ 90 MME PER DAY OPIOID AND NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS

