

DATA BRIEF: NALOXONE PRESCRIPTION IN RESPONSE TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

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 went 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 or more 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.

For the third year since 2020, the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement analyzed the naloxone and opioid prescriptions for Medicaid and commercially insured beneficiaries to inform and understand the trends and patterns of naloxone prescriptions in Arkansas. Data for the analysis were from the Arkansas All-Payer Claims Database, part of the Arkansas Healthcare Transparency Initiative, for state fiscal years (FY) 2017 to 2021. The prior years' data are also updated, which may result in slight changes. Opioid doses of 50 or more MME per day or 90 or more 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 2021, while the number of individuals receiving naloxone prescriptions increased.
- The percentages of individuals who received both naloxone and high-dose opioid prescriptions increased from FY 2017 to FY 2021.
 - Among individuals with opioid prescriptions of 50 or more MME per day, the rate of naloxone co-prescribing increased from 0.05% in FY 2017 to 6.23% in FY 2021.
 - Among individuals with opioid prescriptions of 90 or more MME per day, the rate of naloxone co-prescribing increased from 0.12% in FY 2017 to 10.59% in FY 2021.
- The rate of naloxone prescriptions dispensed per number of individuals receiving high-dose opioid prescriptions improved from FY 2020 to FY 2021.
 - In FY 2021, one naloxone prescription was dispensed for every 16 individuals with opioid prescriptions of 50 or more MME per day, an improvement from one naloxone prescription per 22 individuals in FY 2020.
 - In FY 2021, one naloxone prescription was dispensed for every nine individuals with opioid prescriptions of 90 or more MME per day, an improvement from one naloxone prescription per 14 individuals in FY 2020.
- In FY 2021, pharmacists authorized 1,714 out of 5,506 naloxone prescriptions under state protocol, or 31.1%. This is a decrease from 46.3% in FY 2020.

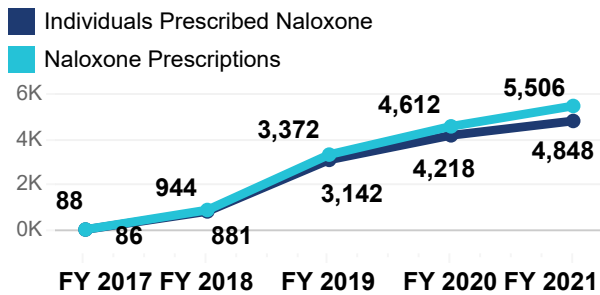
INDIVIDUALS WITH OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS BY AMOUNT AND ANNUAL PERCENTAGE CHANGE, FY 2017 TO 2021

	All Opioid Doses	≥ 50 MME per Day	≥ 90 MME per Day
FY 2017	385,774	119,653	43,122
FY 2018	338,528 (-12.2%)	95,063 (-20.6%)	33,959 (-21.2%)
FY 2019	295,697 (-12.7%)	59,234 (-37.7%)	21,395 (-37.0%)
FY 2020	260,419 (-11.9%)	49,386 (-16.6%)	19,195 (-10.3%)
FY 2021	238,744 (-8.3%)	43,242 (-12.4%)	17,566 (-8.5%)

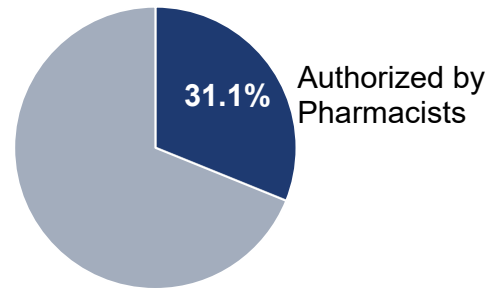
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From FY 2020 to FY 2021, there was a 19.4% increase in naloxone prescriptions and a 14.9% increase in individuals who received naloxone prescriptions. Thirty-one percent of naloxone prescriptions were authorized by pharmacists under state protocol in FY 2021.

NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WHO RECEIVED NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS

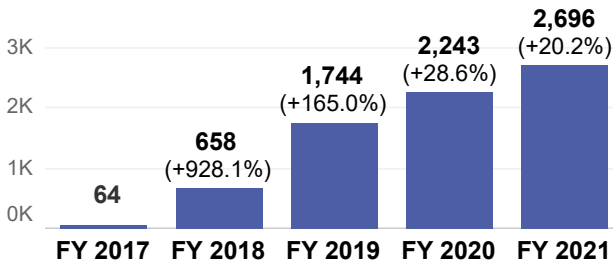


FY 2021 PERCENTAGE OF NALOXONE PRESCRIPTIONS AUTHORIZED BY PHARMACISTS UNDER STATE PROTOCOL

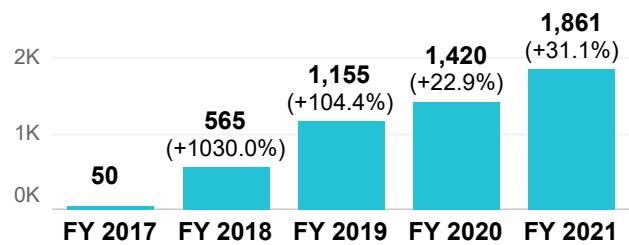


Each state fiscal year, the number of individuals who received both high-dose opioid and naloxone prescriptions increased. From FY 2020 to FY 2021, the number of individuals increased by 20.2% among those with opioid prescriptions of 50 or more MME per day and by 31.1% among those with 90 or more MME per day.

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



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



Arkansas also continues to see an improvement in the percentages of individuals who received both high-dose opioid and naloxone prescriptions each year. In FY 2021, the percentages were 6.23% for individuals with opioid prescriptions of 50 or more MME per day and 10.59% among individuals with 90 or more MME per day.

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

FY 2017	0.05%
FY 2018	0.69%
FY 2019	2.94%
FY 2020	4.54%
FY 2021	6.23%

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

FY 2017	0.12%
FY 2018	1.66%
FY 2019	5.40%
FY 2020	7.40%
FY 2021	10.59%