

# PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS

## Prevalence

### General population

- Past year non-medical use of pharmaceutical opioids (such as oxycodone and morphine) among the general population increased significantly between 2007 and 2010 (from 0.2% to 0.4%). However, prevalence still remains relatively low in Australia.
- There has been a decrease in morphine prescribing in Australia. Prescriptions are most prevalent among older Australians.
- There has been an increase in oxycodone prescribing, particularly among older Australians. This increase may in part be due to legitimate prescribing given the ageing population in Australia however, it is not possible to differentiate non-medical use from legitimate prescribing in these data.
- Fentanyl prescribing has also increased, and again is predominantly prescribed to older Australians.

### Sentinel groups

- Among IDRS participants, injecting use of morphine increased between 2001 and 2007 (from 40% to 50%), however this figure has since declined to 35% in 2013.
- There has been an increase in oxycodone injecting use among IDRS participants, from 17% in 2005 to 31% in 2013.
- Six percent of IDRS participants reported injecting fentanyl in the past six months in 2013.

## Treatment seeking

- Treatment episodes for problems associated with opioids other than heroin have steadily increased over time from 4,779 in 2001/02 to 7,527 in 2011/12. A quarter of these episodes are for morphine related problems. These treatment episodes remain much lower in number than those for heroin (12,918 in 2013).

## Deaths

### Oxycodone

- During the period 2001 to 2009, 465 oxycodone related deaths were recorded.
- Approximately one-quarter (27%) of these decedents had a recorded history of injecting drug use.
- Approximately half (53%) of the decedents had been prescribed oxycodone prior to their death.
- Multiple drugs (in particular alcohol and benzodiazepines) were recorded in the majority (82%) of oxycodone-related deaths.
- Deaths due to heroin outnumber oxycodone-related deaths.
- Mortality related to oxycodone is currently relatively low in Australia, and is not comparable to numbers of oxycodone deaths seen in the United States, where they outnumber heroin and cocaine deaths.

### Fentanyl

- During the period 2000 to 2011, 136 fentanyl related deaths were recorded.
- More than half (54%) of the decedents had a recorded history of injecting drug use.
- Approximately one third (36%) of the decedents had been prescribed fentanyl prior to their death.
- Two-thirds (66%) of the deaths recorded multiple drug toxicity and other drugs present were most notably benzodiazepines, antidepressants and morphine.
- Fentanyl related mortality is currently relatively low in Australia compared to the United States and parts of Europe, however a large proportion of these deaths are occurring among at risk groups who inject drugs.