

25 October 2023

Ref: H23/77101

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## Updating the current temporary guidance on opioid agonist treatment (OAT) takeaways

Dear Prescriber

### **This letter updates the Ministry of Health's previous advice on temporary changes to prescribing unsupervised doses of opioid agonist treatment.**

In March 2020, the Ministry advised OTP prescribers about temporary measures being put in place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we advised that the guidance relating to takeaway doses for stable OTP patients was temporarily amended to reduce the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2. This change allowed for consideration of higher numbers of takeaway doses following a patient risk assessment to reduce the frequency of face-to-face patient reviews, reduce congregation of patients at OTP clinics, and support OTP patients who were being tested for COVID-19 or who were directed to isolate. This advice was rescinded in April 2021 and then reinstated in July 2021.

These measures are no longer required given the subsidence of the pandemic. Outside of a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry guidance on takeaway doses seeks to strike a balance between patient autonomy, practitioner duty of care and public concerns about diversion of medicine.

Therefore, in general, prescribers are to return to the framework for prescribing unsupervised (takeaway) doses of methadone and buprenorphine set out in *NSW Clinical Guidelines: Treatment of Opioid Dependence 2018* (the OTP Guidelines). These provide recommendations for maximum numbers of takeaway doses for patients by clinical risk category.

The OTP Guidelines provide guidance on assessing suitability for takeaways. Clinicians should refer to these guidelines in their decision-making process. Any assessment of suitability for takeaway doses is to involve consideration of risk of harm to the patient and to the community from receiving takeaway doses, including child safety.

Accountability for the decision to prescribe takeaway doses ultimately rests with the prescriber. All prescribers should conduct and document thorough risk assessments when prescribing takeaway and unsupervised doses. In addition, prescribers who continue to prescribe numbers of takeaway doses outside the recommended range of the OTP Guidelines after 25 October 2023 are to:

- Assess and regularly review patient safety
- Document takeaway risk assessments in patient medical records, including child safety risks
- Document reason for prescribing numbers of takeaway doses outside the OTP Guidelines' recommended range in patient medical records
- Consider obtaining specialist advice.

The Ministry will revisit the appropriateness of the recommended range of takeaway doses provided in the OTP Guidelines as part of the guidelines review, which is in the early planning stage. Review of the takeaway guidance as part of the overall OTP Guidelines review will include:

- Thorough consultation with stakeholders
- Consideration of the latest evidence
- Consideration of broader changes to the OTP program in NSW.

### Who to contact

If you have any questions about the OTP Guidelines and their application to assessment of OTP takeaway doses, please contact Clinical Services at the Ministry of Health's Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs by emailing [MOH-CAOD@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:MOH-CAOD@health.nsw.gov.au) (attn: Clinical Services). For general clinical advice, please contact the [Drug & Alcohol Specialist Advisory Service \(DASAS\)](#).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deborah Zador', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr Deborah Zador**

Chief Addiction Medicine Specialist, Centre for Alcohol and Other Drugs