



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **National Summit in Canberra to Plan Improvements for Opioid Treatment**

Harm Reduction Australia and ScriptWise are joining forces to host a national summit in Canberra on May 23 to re-think outdated policies and increase access to opioid treatment.

The current system, the two organisations say, must be updated to ensure Australia avoids continuing on a trajectory towards the opioid crisis currently being seen in the US.

“People who are opioid dependent have the same right to high-quality health care as other Australians,” says Harm Reduction Australia co-founder Annie Madden.

“The current system has not kept pace with the research and development in relation to standards of care and the rights of health consumers over the past 20 years and this needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.”

“Addressing the out-dated and fragmented policies and regulations that currently underpin our approach to opioid treatment will mean that more Australians will be able to access the treatment they want and need, and in a way that works for them,” she said.

The cost burden of dispensing fees for opioid treatment medications such as methadone and buprenorphine is one of the most significant barriers to treatment for consumers.

Consumers, the majority of whom are already financially disadvantaged, pay over \$40 every week on average to receive effective treatment to manage this chronic medical condition.

The ACT Government currently subsidises dispensing fees for medications through a fee-sharing system that includes a modest consumer co-payment. Unfortunately other States and Territories have not yet implemented similar measures to reduce the cost of treatment for consumers.

ScriptWise CEO Bee Mohamed says this new partnership is also an important opportunity to reduce the stigma around seeking treatment for both illicit and licit opioid dependency.

“There are effective medical treatments for opioid dependence, and we need to do more to ensure that stigma doesn’t prevent people from accessing help,” said Ms Mohamed.

“Opioid dependence can happen to anyone. Just like other medical conditions, it does not discriminate.”

“How someone became dependent on opioids shouldn’t influence the quality of the medical care they receive. No one wants, or deserves to, experience the often-devastating consequences of dependence on all areas of their life,” she said.

**For more information or to interview co-founder of Harm Reduction Australia Annie Madden or ScriptWise CEO Bee Mohamed**, please contact Lara Beissbarth on 0425 872 744 or at [lara@scriptwise.org.au](mailto:lara@scriptwise.org.au).

## Medication-assisted treatment for opioid dependence (MATOD)

The [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's recently released national opioid pharmacotherapy statistics](#) annual data indicate that in 2017:

- Almost 50,000 people received pharmacotherapy treatment for opioid dependence
- 89% of opioid pharmacotherapy dosing points were pharmacies
- the median age of opioid pharmacotherapy clients was 42

### MATOD and the opioid health issue in Australia

- There is a large body of research and evidence that demonstrates MATOD is very effective for treating opioid dependence
- MATOD [reduces the risk of overdose](#) in communities and also gives people the opportunity to [resume study or work or rejoin their families](#)
- According to the [National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, in 2013](#), there were 668 accidental opioid overdose deaths in Australia (639 in 2012)
- Opioid overdose deaths among 45-54 year olds were higher than at the peak of the heroin epidemic in 2001

A 2017 [National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre study](#) by Sasha Cooper and Suzanne Nielsen found:

- Treatment related stigma may present a treatment barrier for people who use pharmaceutical opioids
- People in opioid substitution therapy feel heavily stigmatised at clinical, structural and political levels
- People who use pharmaceutical opioids experience drug-related stigma in complex and unique ways and may adopt secrecy rather than seeking support.

### About Harm Reduction Australia

[Harm Reduction Australia](#) (HRA) is the first national organisation for individuals across Australia to join together in their commitment to reducing the health, social and economic harms potentially associated with drug use.

### About ScriptWise

[ScriptWise](#) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to preventing the harms associated with prescription medication use and misuse. ScriptWise works with key health organisations, professionals, governments and those personally affected to address the root causes of this multifaceted issue. Our vision is to reduce overdose fatalities caused by prescription medication misuse across Australia to zero. [www.scriptwise.org.au](http://www.scriptwise.org.au)