

Opioid trends in Halton: Prescription opioid use (2022)

Health indicator report

Background

- The purpose of this health indicator report is to provide information on the prescribing of opioid medications to individuals living in Halton Region. This report includes data regarding the **rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain**, which refers to the number of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain per 1,000 people.
- Opioids are a class of drugs that are mainly used to treat pain. Examples include codeine, morphine and fentanyl. However, opioids can also induce feelings of euphoria and pleasure.¹ Opioid use may result in dependence, and because of the effect of opioids on the part of the brain that controls breathing, can cause a life-threatening overdose.¹
- Opioids can be prescribed medications or can be produced or obtained illegally. While many opioid-related harms involve illegal opioids, prescription opioids also contribute. In recent years, initiatives have been launched in Canada to improve opioid prescribing practices, resulting in fewer people being prescribed opioids.²
- This health indicator report uses data from the Ontario Narcotics Monitoring System, as provided by the Ontario Drug Policy Research Network.³

Key findings

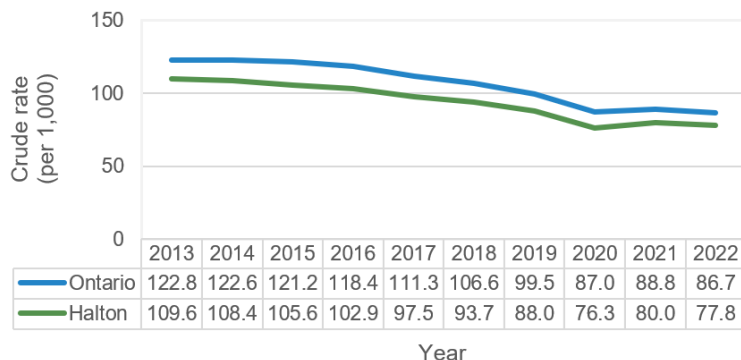
- In Halton and Ontario, the rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain gradually declined between 2013 and 2020 but remained relatively stable between 2020 and 2022.
- In 2022, the rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain was lower in Halton compared to Ontario.
- 71% of Halton residents who were dispensed an opioid for pain in 2022 were new users, meaning they had not been dispensed a prescription opioid for any reason in the past year.
- In Halton, females and those aged 65+ were the most likely to be dispensed an opioid in 2022.



Prescription opioid use

Trends over time

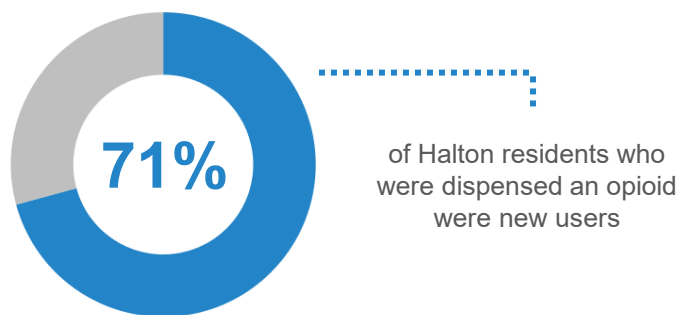
- In 2022, there were 49,300 individuals dispensed an opioid for pain in Halton, and 1,302,337 in Ontario overall (not shown).
- The rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain was lower in Halton (77.8 per 1,000 people) compared to Ontario (86.7 per 1,000 people) in 2022. This difference was **statistically significant**.
- In both Halton and Ontario, the rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain gradually declined between 2013 and 2020 but remained relatively stable between 2020 and 2022.



Crude rate (per 1,000 population) of individuals dispensed opioids for pain, Halton and Ontario, 2013-2022

New users

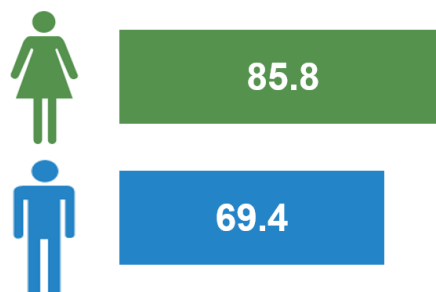
- In 2022, nearly three-quarters (71%) of Halton residents who were dispensed an opioid for pain were new users (had not been dispensed a prescription opioid for any reason in the past year). This means that for every 1,000 Halton residents who were dispensed opioids, 55.1 were new opioid users.
- This is similar to Ontario, where in 2022, 64% of Ontario residents who were dispensed an opioid for pain were new users (not shown).



Percentage of individuals dispensed opioids for pain who were new users, Halton Region, 2022

Sex

- In 2022 in Halton, 27,772 females and 21,528 males were dispensed an opioid for pain (not shown).
- In 2022, the rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain was higher among females (85.8 per 1,000) compared to males (69.4 per 1,000) in Halton. This difference was **statistically significant**.



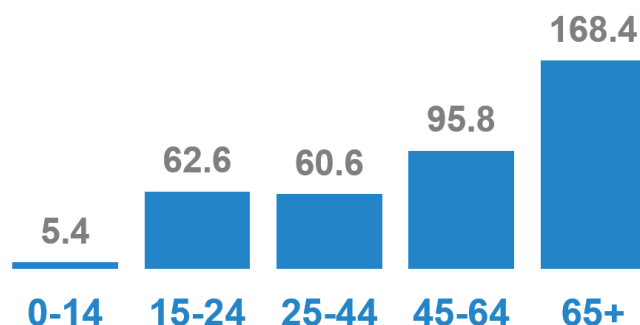
Rate (per 1,000 population) of individuals dispensed opioids for pain, by sex, Halton Region, 2022



Prescription opioid use

Age

- The rate of individuals dispensed an opioid for pain tends to increase with age.
- In 2022, the rate of individuals dispensed opioids for pain was highest among adults aged 65 and older (168.4 per 1,000 people). This difference was **statistically significant** when comparing adults aged 65+ to all other age groups.
- Adults aged 45 to 64 had a higher rate compared to those aged 0 to 14, 15 to 24 or 25 to 44 and these differences were **statistically significant**.



Rate (per 1,000 population) of individuals dispensed opioids for pain, by age, Halton Region, 2022

Data notes

Definitions:

Individual dispensed an opioid for pain means a unique individual who was dispensed a prescription opioid with an indication to treat pain. This includes opioids administered orally and transdermally (through the skin), as well as injectables and suppositories. Opioids for opioid agonist therapy (to treat opioid addiction), opioids for cough/diarrhea/medical assistance in dying, and over-the-counter pain medications containing opioids are not included.

New individual dispensed an opioid for pain

means the individual had not been dispensed a prescription opioid to treat pain, cough, or for opioid agonist therapy in the year prior to the claim date of their first prescription opioid for pain in 2022. This does not capture new episodes of opioid for pain treatment among individuals who discontinued treatment and started a new course of opioid therapy for pain within a period of less than one year.

Limitations:

All rates shown that are not age- and sex-specific are crude rates, which means they have not been adjusted for factors such as age.

Individuals may be prescribed or dispensed opioids, but may not actually take them.

Information on age and sex reflects the personal information of the prescription recipient, however some opioids may be diverted and taken by individuals other than the prescription recipient.

Data on non-prescription opioids and prescription opioids that get diverted to unintended recipients is a known data gap in Halton Region and Ontario.

Data Source: Ontario Drug Policy Research Network. Ontario Prescription Opioid Tool. Toronto, ON; Updated August 2023. Accessed November 2023 from <http://odprn.ca/ontario-opioid-drugobservatory/ontario-prescription-opioid-tool/>

References

1. Health Canada. 2023. About Opioids. Accessed November 2023 from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/substance-use/problematic-prescription-drug-use/opioids/about.html>
2. Canadian Institute for Health Information. 2019. Opioid Prescribing in Canada: How are Practices Changing? Accessed January 2020 from <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/opioid-prescribing-canada-trends-en-web.pdf>
3. Ontario Drug Policy Research Network. 2023. Ontario Prescription Opioid Tool: Technical Appendix. Accessed November 2023 from <https://odprn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Ontario-Prescription-Opioid-Tool-Technical-Appendix-July-2019.pdf>

For more health indicator and health status reports, visit the Halton Health Statistics webpage at halton.ca.