

NEW DATA REVEALS THE LONG ROAD AHEAD IN MINIMISING OPIOID RELATED HARM

Data released by the [Australian Bureau of Statistics on Australia's leading causes of death 2018](#) reveals that opioids accounted for just over 3 deaths per day in 2018. The majority of these opioid-induced fatalities were unintentional overdoses in middle aged males involving the use of pharmaceutical opioids, often in the presence of other substances.

The data also reveals modest improvements: Opioid-induced mortality in 2018 was slightly lower than that recorded in 2017.

Painaustralia CEO Carol Bennett notes these findings once again shine a light on Australians fighting what is often an invisible illness – pain.

“Australia is facing a pain epidemic. With over [3.24 million Australians living with chronic](#) pain, and limited access to options, doctors and consumers continue to rely heavily on prescription opioids to manage what is a multi-faceted, complex condition that needs much more in terms of support and resourcing. Yet sadly Pain as an issue, has been missing from health and public policy discussions, despite the huge toll chronic pain continues to take on millions of Australians every day,” Ms Bennett said.

Pain is not being well managed in Australia. Over 70% of GP consultations that involve pain management result in the prescription of medication. The ABS data shows that pharmaceutical opioids are present in over 70% of opioid-induced deaths. The rate of opioid-induced deaths with synthetic opioids present has increased significantly over the last decade.

“Medications are an important part of managing pain, but do not necessarily need to be the first line of therapy when people in pain are looking for help. Nearly three Australians are losing their life to opioid misuse and harm every day, many just wanted help with their pain, but ended up in a worse situation, experiencing serious depression and dependence,” Ms Bennett said.

Consultations with the pain management sector and stakeholders have confirmed the need for greater awareness of pain and pain management, more timely access to consumer-centred interdisciplinary services and research to underpin greater knowledge of pain.

“[The National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management](#), the first in the world to be funded by the Government, provides us with a clear pathway to meet the challenges that chronic pain poses to all Australians. The [Deloitte Access Economics Cost of Pain](#) report released by Minister Hunt in April this year has highlighted the seriousness of the pain burden in Australia, and along with the new ABS data we now have clear and compelling case for investment and support to prevent and manage chronic pain conditions,” Ms. Bennett said.

According to Ms Bennett “As the plan progresses to the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Committee of the Council of Australian Governments for consideration and endorsement, it is important to recognise that behind all the statistics and numbers are real people, living with real challenges every day. There is no one size fits all pathway here. We must invest in a range of treatments and services that can assist people to manage their pain condition. We should not expect this to be a quick and easy fix.”

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About Painaustralia

Painaustralia is Australia's peak national pain advocacy body working to improve the quality of life of people living with pain, their families and carers, and to minimise the social and economic burden of pain on individuals and the community.

National Patron

Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC (Ret'd)

Media enquiries

Priyanka Rai (02) 6232 5588 or media@painaustralia.org.au