

# Monitoring HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake in Australia



Issue #8, May 2023

HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) was listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) on 1 April 2018. The PBS subsidises the cost of PrEP for people eligible for Medicare in Australia. The cost to the patient for 30 pills as of May 2023 was \$30.00 for general patients and \$7.30 for concession card holders.

This report uses data from every PBS-subsidised PrEP prescription that was dispensed in Australia between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2022. The de-identified data incorporate unique codes for linking individuals. Variables include patient details (age, sex, postcode of residence, concession status), information about dispensing (date of dispensing, quantity dispensed), and prescriber details (postcode, specialty).

Data are presented on the total number of people who have ever initiated PBS-subsidised PrEP, as well as the number of people dispensed PrEP within each quarter, and within the past 12 months. These data are disaggregated by age, and by state or territory of patient residence, and presented as population rates. This report also includes a section investigating the effect of COVID-19-related lockdowns on monthly dispensing data by jurisdiction.

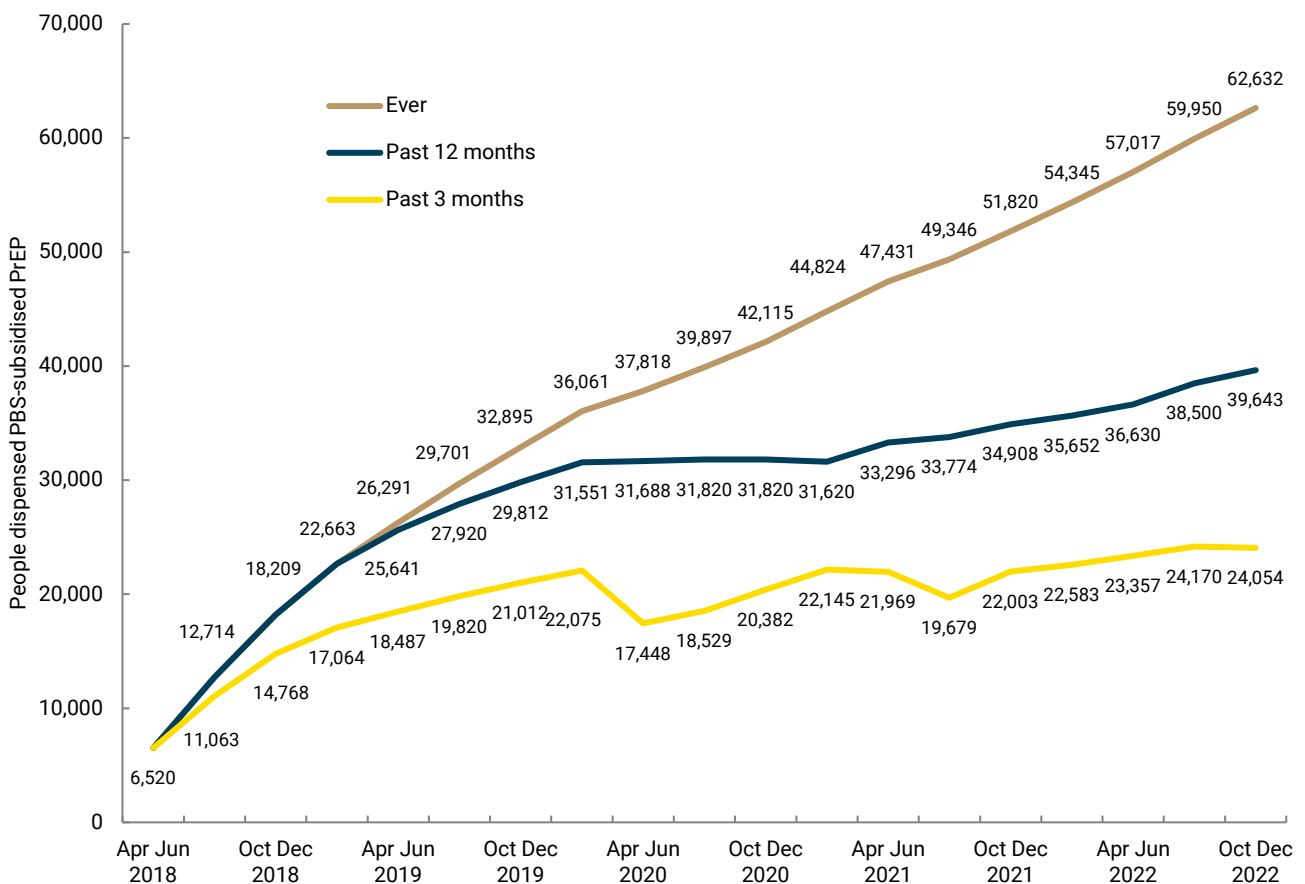


## Number of people ever and recently dispensed PrEP

Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2022, 62,632 people (97.9% male) were dispensed PBS-subsidised PrEP at least once.

The number of individuals dispensed PrEP within the past 12 months increased to a new high of 39,643 in Q4 2022.

Figure 1: Number of people ever and recently dispensed PBS-subsidised PrEP.





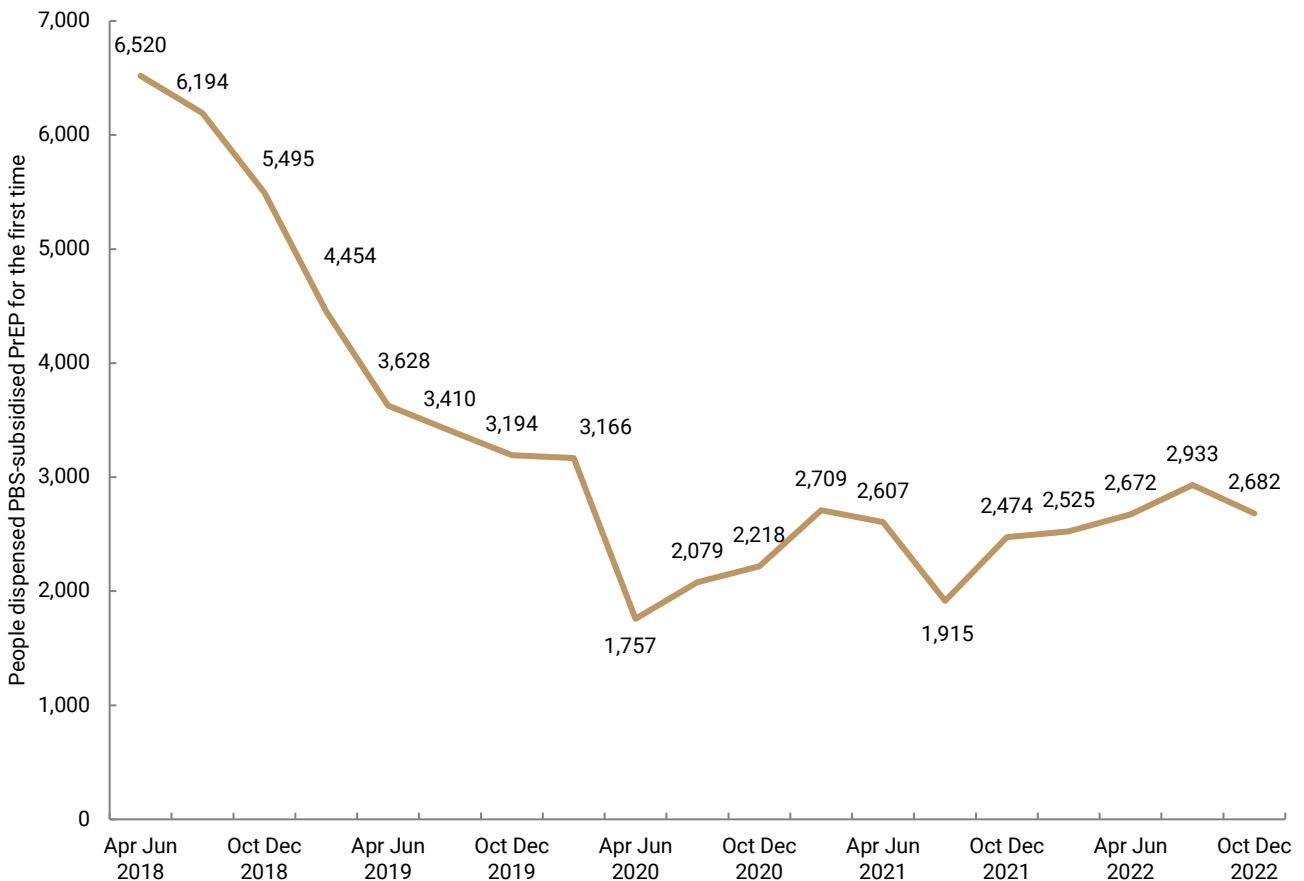
## PrEP initiation and prescribers

In the first three months after PBS listing, 6,520 individuals were dispensed PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time.

The number of people accessing PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time decreased rapidly during its first year of availability. Far fewer people accessed PrEP for the first time in the quarters affected by COVID-19 lockdowns.

The 62,632 people ever supplied were prescribed their first PBS-subsidised PrEP by 18,217 prescribers; 1.7% (n=310) of prescribers had caseloads of more than 100 PrEP patients. These high-caseload prescribers were responsible for prescribing 56.2% of patients (n=35,215) with their first supplies of PBS-subsidised PrEP.

Figure 2: Number of people dispensed PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time each quarter





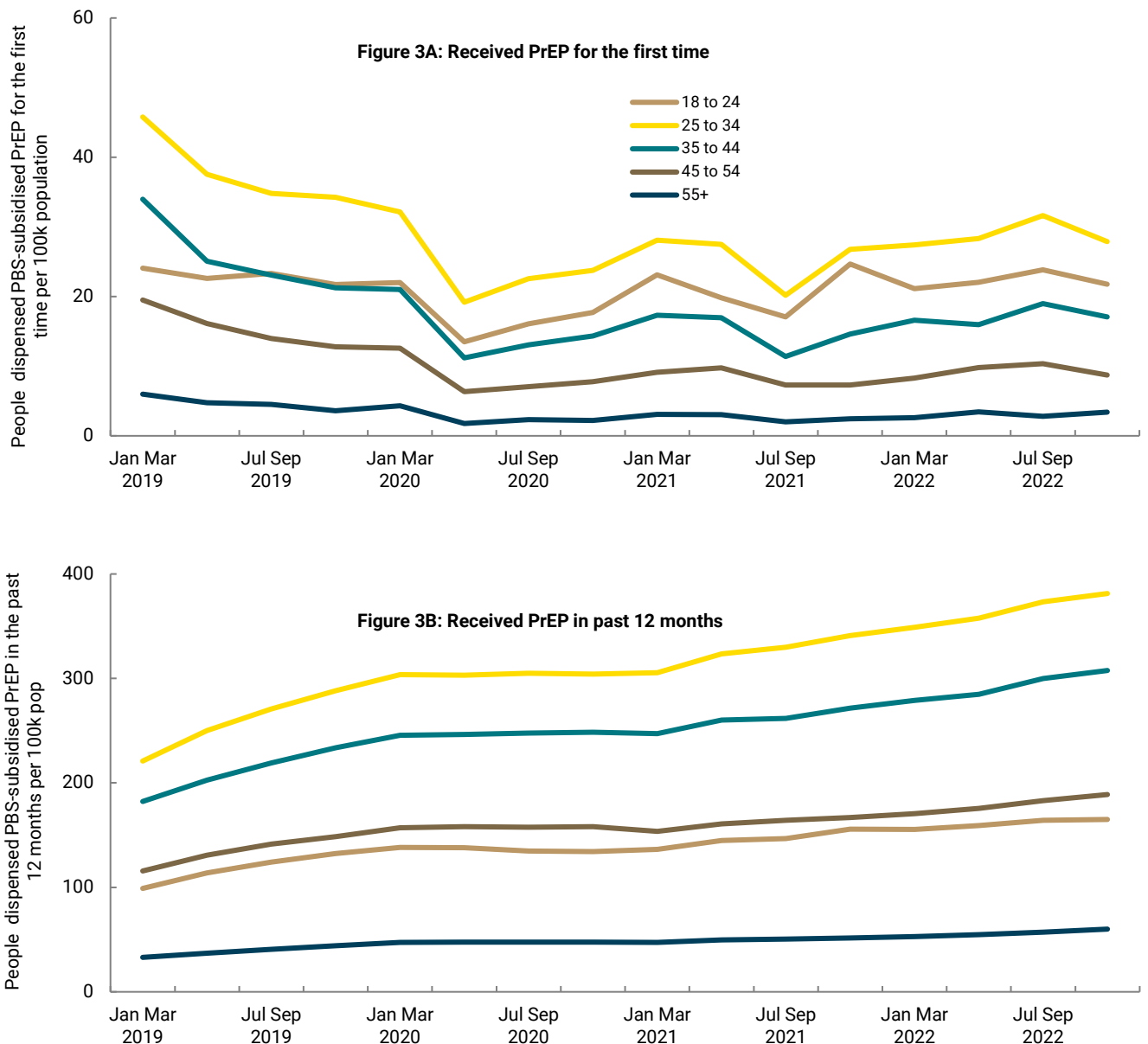
## Age

Among people who ever used PBS-subsidised PrEP, 15.2% were under 24, 38.6% were 25 to 34, 23.9% were 35 to 44, 13.5% were 45 to 54, and 8.8% were 55 or older when they received PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time.

The rate per 100,000 population of accessing PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time decreased over time among all age groups except those aged 18 to 24. There were greater decreases around the time of COVID-19 lockdowns (Figure 3A).

People aged 25 to 34 had the highest rates of recent dispensing per 100,000 population (Figure 3B). Rates are based on age group population not the population of people for whom PrEP may be suitable.

Figure 3: Rate of PrEP dispensing per 100,000 population for the first time (A) and in the past 12 months (B) by age group



Note. Population denominator is based on estimated total Australian population within each age group.



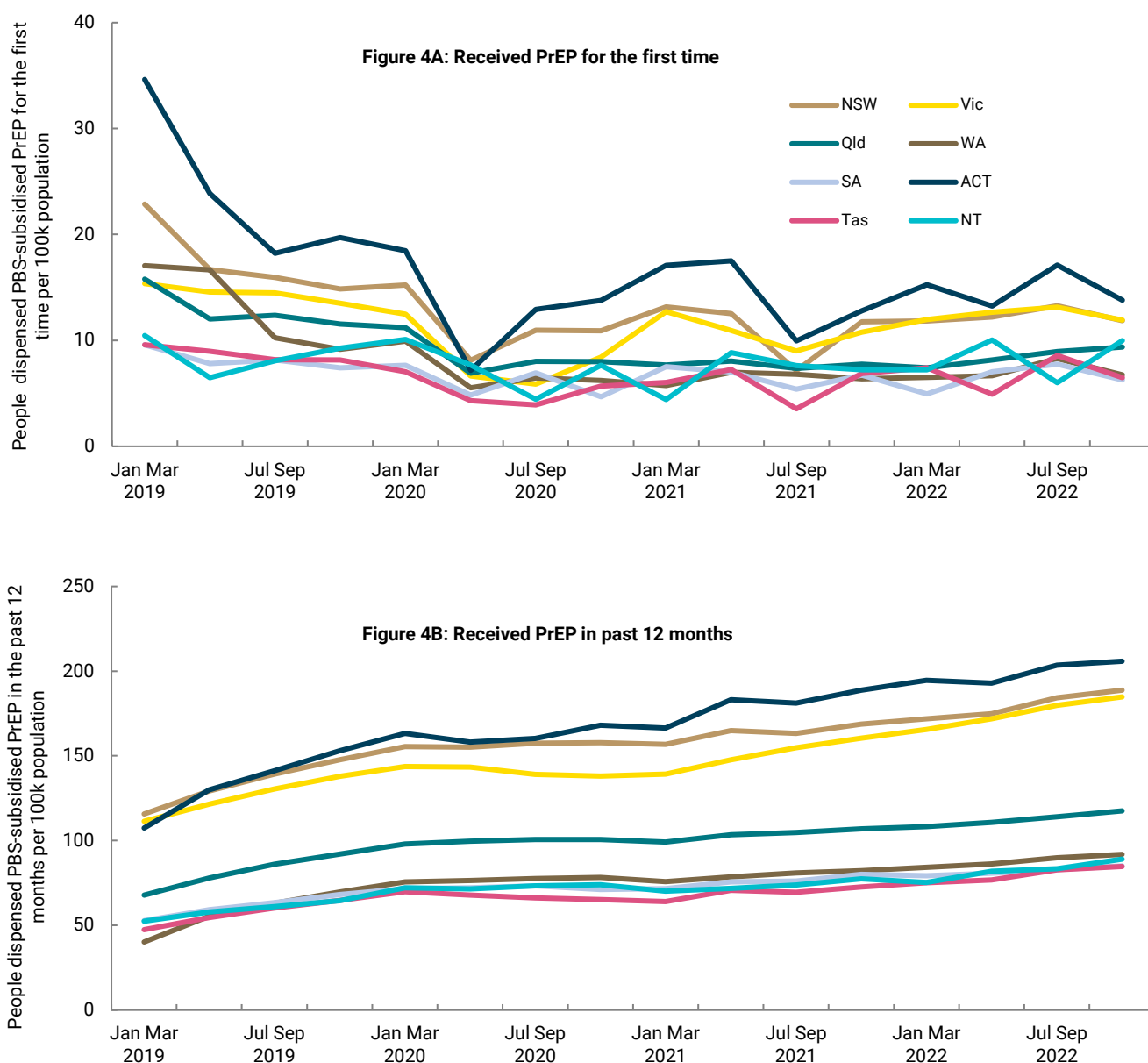
## State and territory

Among people who ever accessed PBS-subsidised PrEP, 38.8% were in NSW, 29.1% in Vic, 16.6% in Qld, 6.8% in WA, 4.4% in SA, 2.4% in ACT, 1.3% in Tas, and 0.7% in NT when they first accessed it.

The number of people accessing PBS-subsidised PrEP for the first time decreased in all jurisdictions over time, with more rapid decreases around the time of COVID-19 lockdowns (Figure 4A).

ACT saw the highest rates per 100,000 population of first time and recent use, followed by NSW and Vic. Rates are based on total population not the population of people for whom PrEP could be suitable. Raw counts of dispensing by jurisdiction are shown in Appendix A.

Figure 4: Rate of PrEP dispensing per 100,000 population for the first time (A) and in the past 12 months (B) by state or territory



Note. Population denominator is based on estimated total Australian population by state and territory.

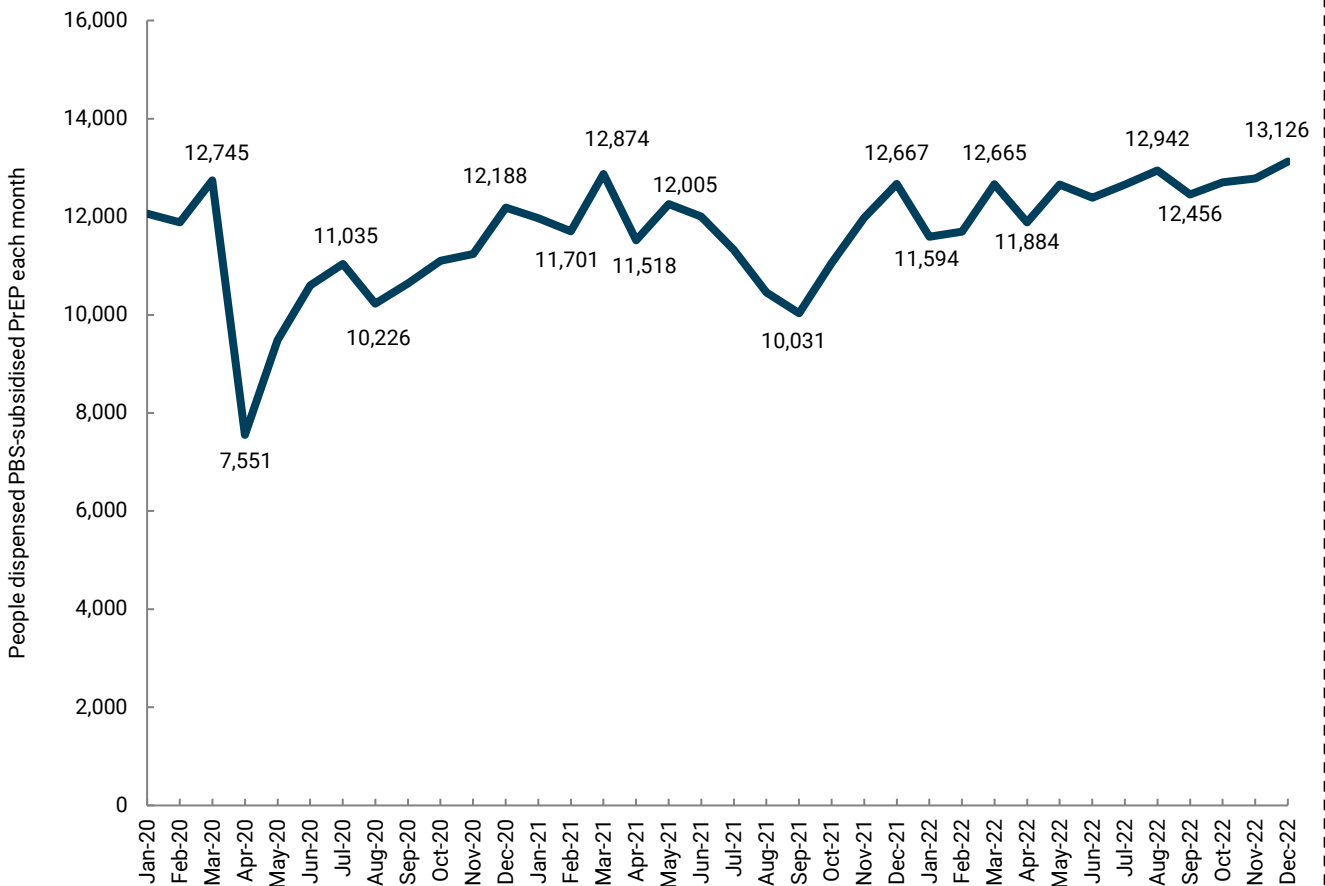


## Special report: Monthly dispensing during COVID-related lockdown periods

This section reports the number of people dispensed PrEP in each calendar month just prior to and since COVID-19-related restrictions in Australia.

The number of people dispensed PrEP decreased and recovered in line with major COVID-19 related lockdowns.

Figure 5: Number of people dispensed PrEP each month between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2022





Lockdowns varied by state and territory, and the trend of monthly dispensing for each jurisdiction is shown in the series of graphs in Figure 6.

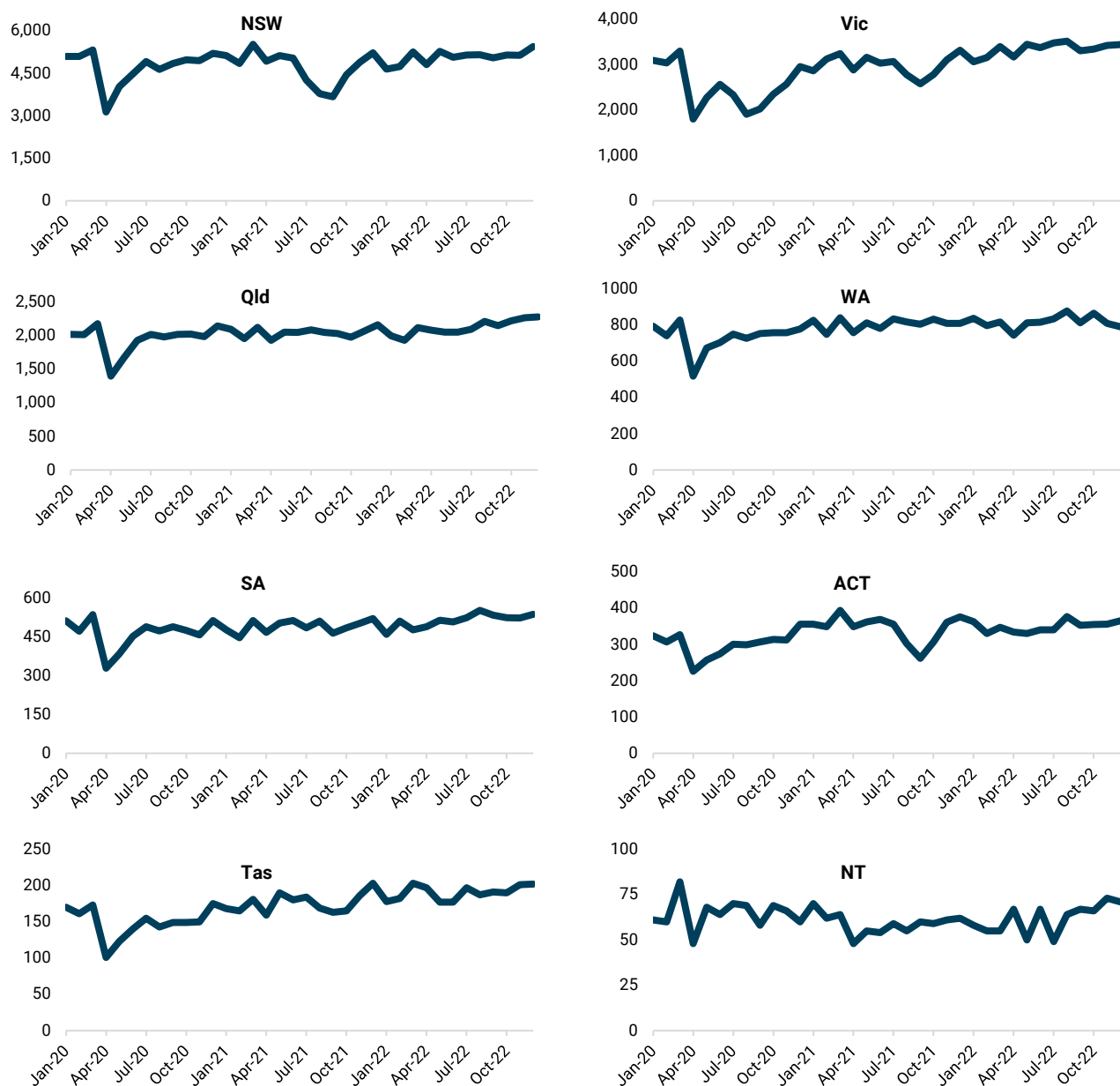
Trends were similar nationally, with the lowest number of people dispensed PrEP occurring in April 2020 for all jurisdictions.

In Victoria, monthly levels remained lower for a longer period, reflecting the lockdowns that occurred in mid to late 2020.

All jurisdictions recovered to 2019 levels by March 2021.

There were additional decreases in monthly dispensing from mid-2021 in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT, followed by consistent monthly dispensing.

Figure 6: Number of people dispensed PrEP each month by state/territory of residence, 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2022.



Note. The vertical axes differ between jurisdictions.



## Methods and notes on the dataset

The dataset is provided by the Australian Government Department of Health. It contains de-identified linked data for all dispensed PrEP prescriptions subsidised by the PBS since 1 April 2018. Data are provided quarterly and can include retrospective updates, meaning numbers presented here could differ slightly from previous editions. Each record corresponds to a single supply of PrEP and includes information about the date of prescription, date of supply, anonymised patient codes allowing linkage of supplies within patients, and anonymised prescriber codes allowing linkage of supplies within prescribers. The item codes were: 11276L, 11296M, 11306C, 12542D.

The PBS dataset provides an underestimate of total PrEP purchasing in Australia. It does not include PrEP purchased outside of this scheme, either at full price from a pharmacy or online from overseas. In 2021, the Gay Community Periodic Surveys found that <10% of gay and bisexual men who were using PrEP purchased it online from overseas pharmacies.<sup>1</sup> Overseas-born gay and bisexual men are becoming a growing focus of HIV prevention in Australia but people from that population who are not eligible for Medicare cannot purchase PBS-subsidised PrEP and are not accounted for in these data.

It is not possible to make conclusions about prevention-effective adherence from this dataset, that is, whether PrEP is being used during periods of HIV risk by individuals. It is also important to interpret dispensing patterns in the context of changing usage patterns. In 2019, the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM) PrEP guidelines were updated to support event-driven (on-demand; 2-1-1) dosing for cisgender gay and bisexual men, and an increase in use of these schedules has been documented in community-based surveys (18% of gay and bisexual men who used PrEP in 2021).<sup>1</sup> A shift to more event-driven dosing means reduced frequency of refilling PrEP prescriptions without necessarily leading to a reduction in prevention-effective adherence.

The population rates presented in this report are based on the total population using ABS quarterly estimates for total persons (male and female). These rates are not based on a population of gay and bisexual men, or an estimate of people who might be suitable for PrEP. Any comparisons of population rates between jurisdictions or age groups should be interpreted with caution.

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<sup>1</sup>Gay Community Periodic Surveys, 2021, CSRH, UNSW Sydney: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/research/csrh/our-projects/gay-community-periodic-surveys>





## Appendix A: Dispensing by jurisdiction

Table 1. Number of people dispensed PrEP in the past 12 months

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	ACT	Tas	NT
2018 Q2	1,712	3,605	644	211	166	101	38	46
2018 Q3	4,780	5,142	1,441	396	559	189	127	80
2018 Q4	7,399	6,179	2,626	618	762	314	202	109
2019 Q1	9,223	7,188	3,415	1,058	926	465	258	130
2019 Q2	10,334	7,864	3,932	1,464	1,040	566	298	143
2019 Q3	11,169	8,493	4,367	1,672	1,117	620	331	151
2019 Q4	11,870	9,005	4,685	1,853	1,207	675	357	160
2020 Q1	12,523	9,430	5,010	2,025	1,272	725	387	179
2020 Q2	12,528	9,440	5,114	2,059	1,286	705	379	177
2020 Q3	12,746	9,190	5,196	2,103	1,312	719	372	182
2020 Q4	12,773	9,126	5,209	2,129	1,275	757	367	184
2021 Q1	12,680	9,171	5,135	2,063	1,285	750	361	175
2021 Q2	13,330	9,691	5,366	2,145	1,359	827	399	179
2021 Q3	13,198	10,140	5,452	2,217	1,369	820	394	184
2021 Q4	13,655	10,506	5,579	2,262	1,445	856	412	193
2022 Q1	13,897	10,837	5,676	2,319	1,428	881	426	188
2022 Q2	14,159	11,281	5,833	2,382	1,459	875	437	204
2022 Q3	14,993	11,859	6,041	2,494	1,504	928	472	209
2022 Q4	15,401	12,230	6,257	2,559	1,549	940	484	223

Note. For past 12-month dispensing, individuals can be counted in multiple jurisdictions so the sum across jurisdictions in one period could be higher than the national count.

Table 2. Number of people dispensed PrEP for the first time each quarter

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	ACT	Tas	NT
2018 Q2	1,710	3,605	643	211	166	101	38	46
2018 Q3	3,079	1,522	804	185	397	85	88	34
2018 Q4	2,623	1,054	1,169	216	206	126	74	<30
2019 Q1	1,824	991	794	449	168	150	52	<30
2019 Q2	1,333	942	607	440	137	104	49	<30
2019 Q3	1,278	944	627	272	144	80	45	<30
2019 Q4	1,194	882	588	244	131	87	45	<30
2020 Q1	1,227	818	573	266	136	82	39	<30
2020 Q2	656	437	354	149	86	32	<30	<30
2020 Q3	888	387	414	175	124	58	22	<30
2020 Q4	882	556	414	169	84	62	32	<30
2021 Q1	1,063	836	397	156	135	77	34	<30
2021 Q2	1,013	717	418	191	126	79	41	<30
2021 Q3	577	589	382	186	97	45	<30	<30
2021 Q4	952	706	405	175	121	58	39	<30
2022 Q1	957	783	388	179	89	69	42	<30
2022 Q2	988	831	429	184	127	60	<30	<30
2022 Q3	1,079	867	474	230	141	78	49	<30
2022 Q4	968	788	499	188	114	63	37	<30