

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



Issue #6, May 2022

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 2022 was \$42.50 for general patients and \$6.80 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 2021. 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).

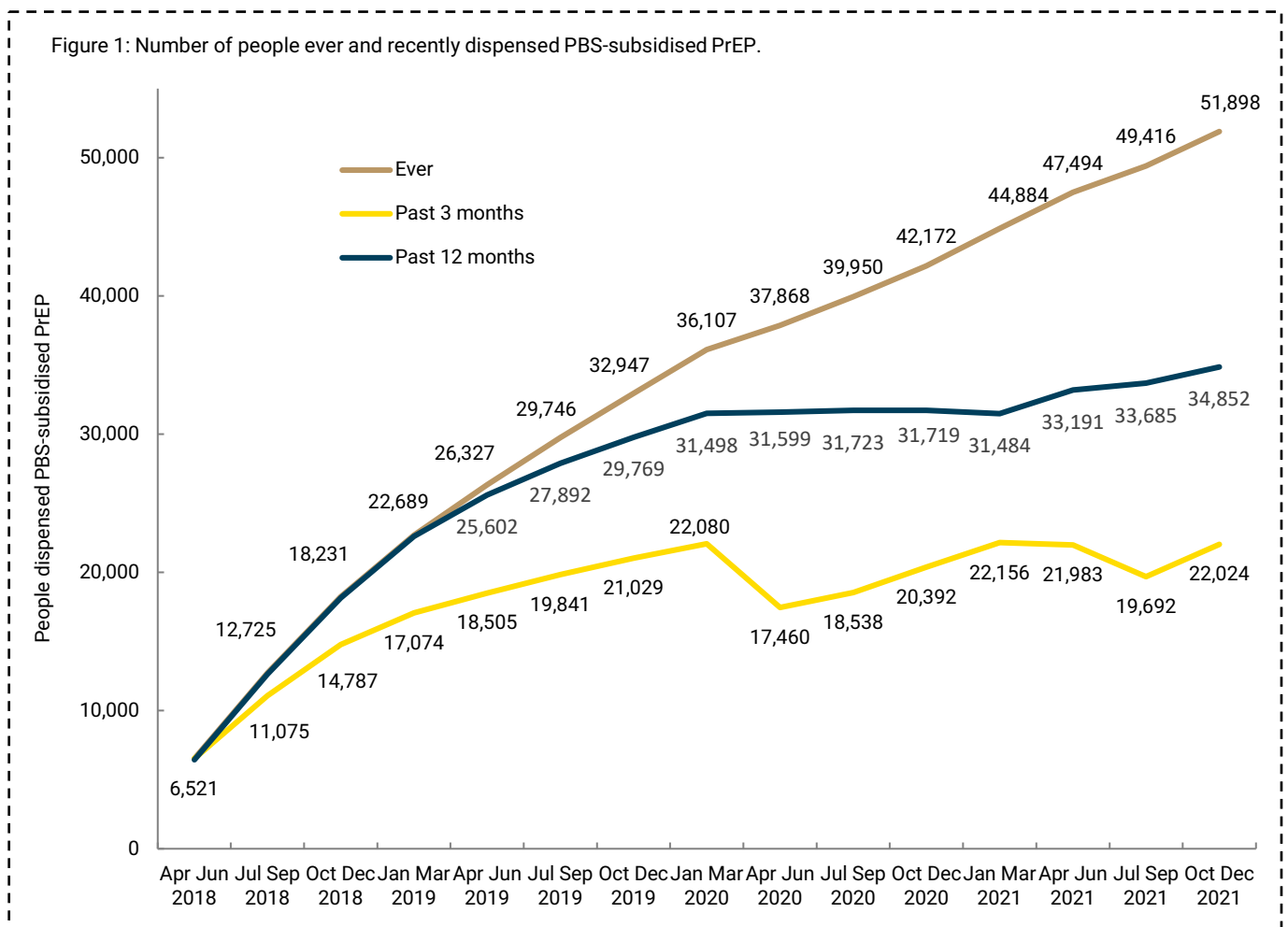
Data are presented on the total number of people who have ever initiated PBS-subsidised PrEP, as well as the number of people dispensed PrEP within each quarter, and within the past 12 months. These data are disaggregated by age, and by state or territory of patient residence, and presented as population 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 2021, 51,898 people (98.2% male) were dispensed PBS-subsidised PrEP at least once.

The number of individuals dispensed PrEP within a calendar quarter increased from 6,521 in Q2 2018, to peaks of 22,080 in Q1 2020, and 22,156 in Q1 2021. By the end of 2021, the number of people who had been dispensed PrEP at least once in the past 12 months reached a peak of 34,852.





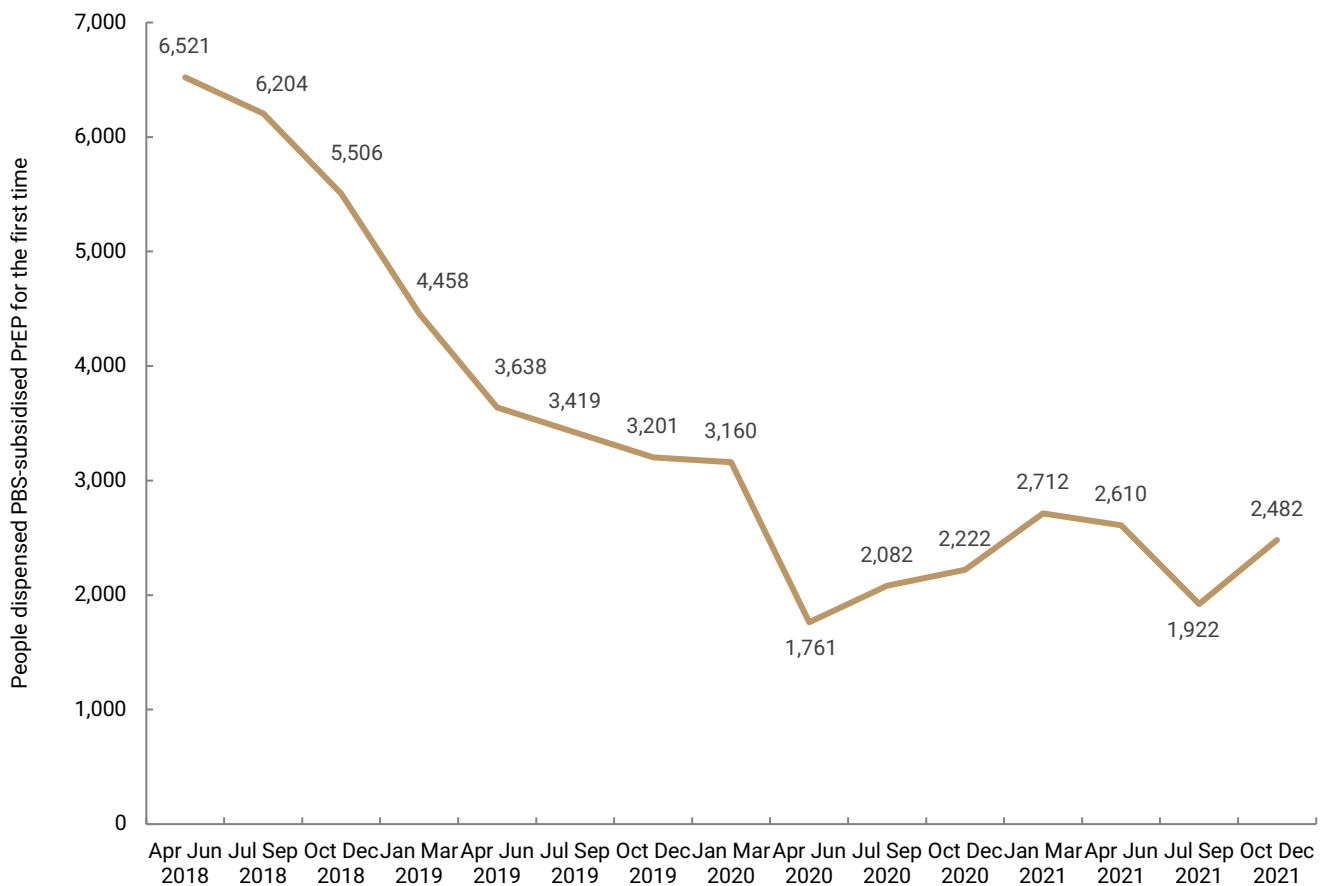
## PrEP initiation and prescribers

In the first three months after PBS listing, 6,521 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 51,898 patients were prescribed their first PBS-subsidised PrEP by 15,195 prescribers; 1.7% (n=254) of prescribers had caseloads of more than 100 PrEP patients. These high-caseload prescribers were responsible for prescribing 55.3% of patients (n=28,685) with their first supplies of PBS-subsidised PrEP.

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





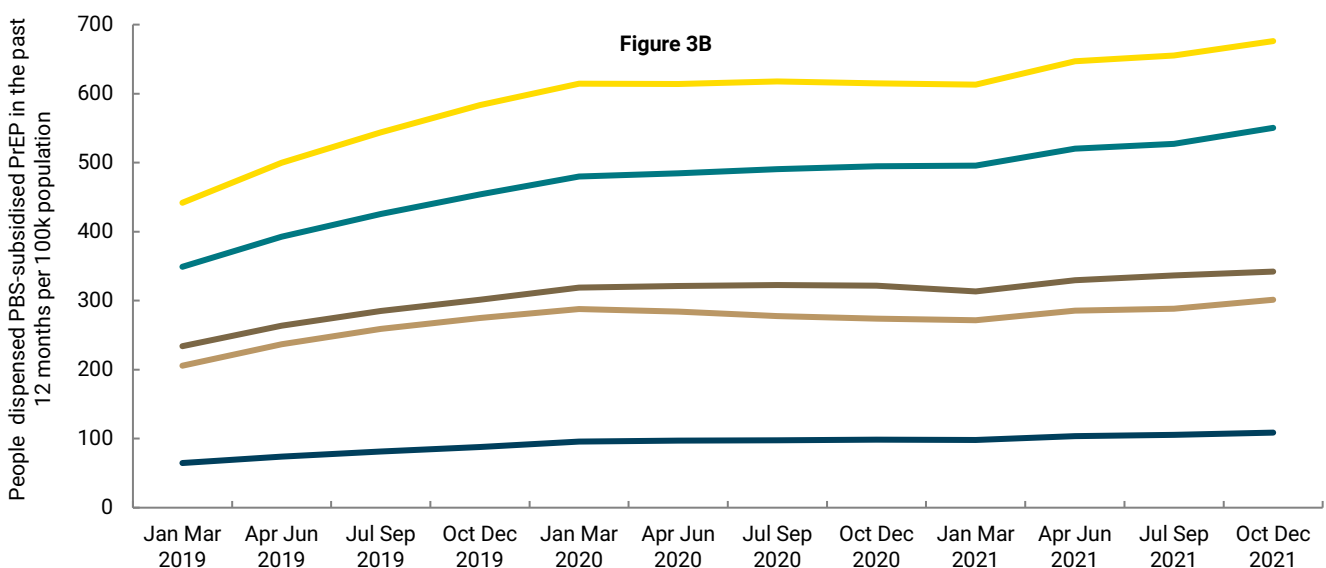
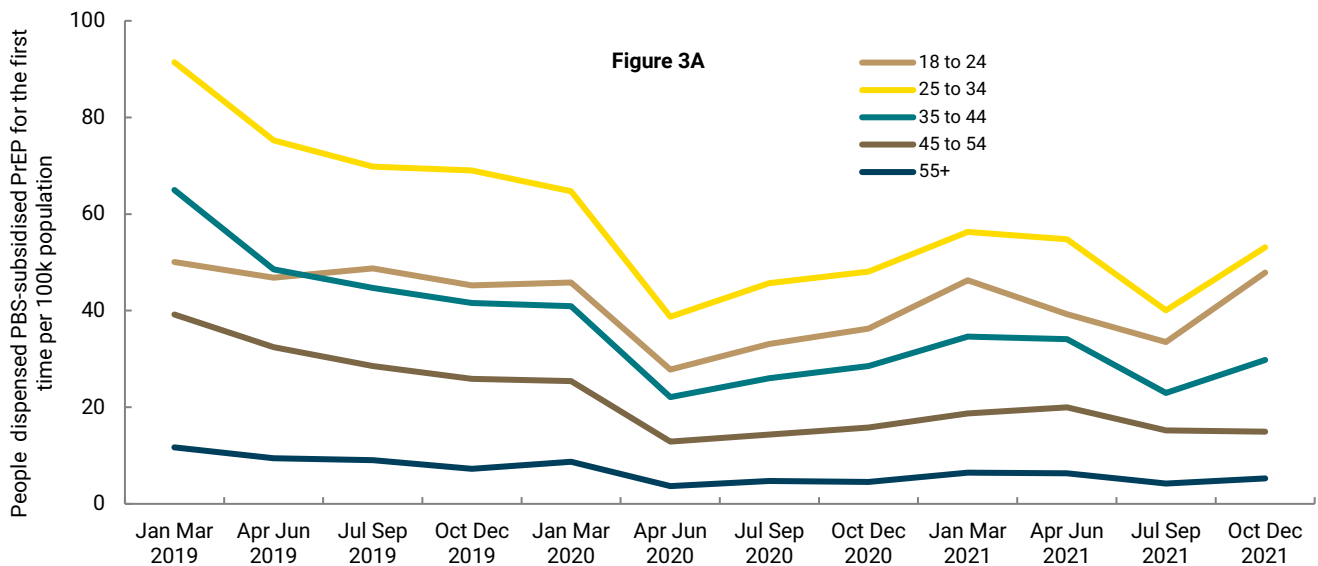
## Age

Among people who ever used PBS-subsidised PrEP, 14.6% were under 25, 38.4% were 25 to 34, 24.1% were 35 to 44, 14.0% were 45 to 54, and 8.9% 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 25. 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 could 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





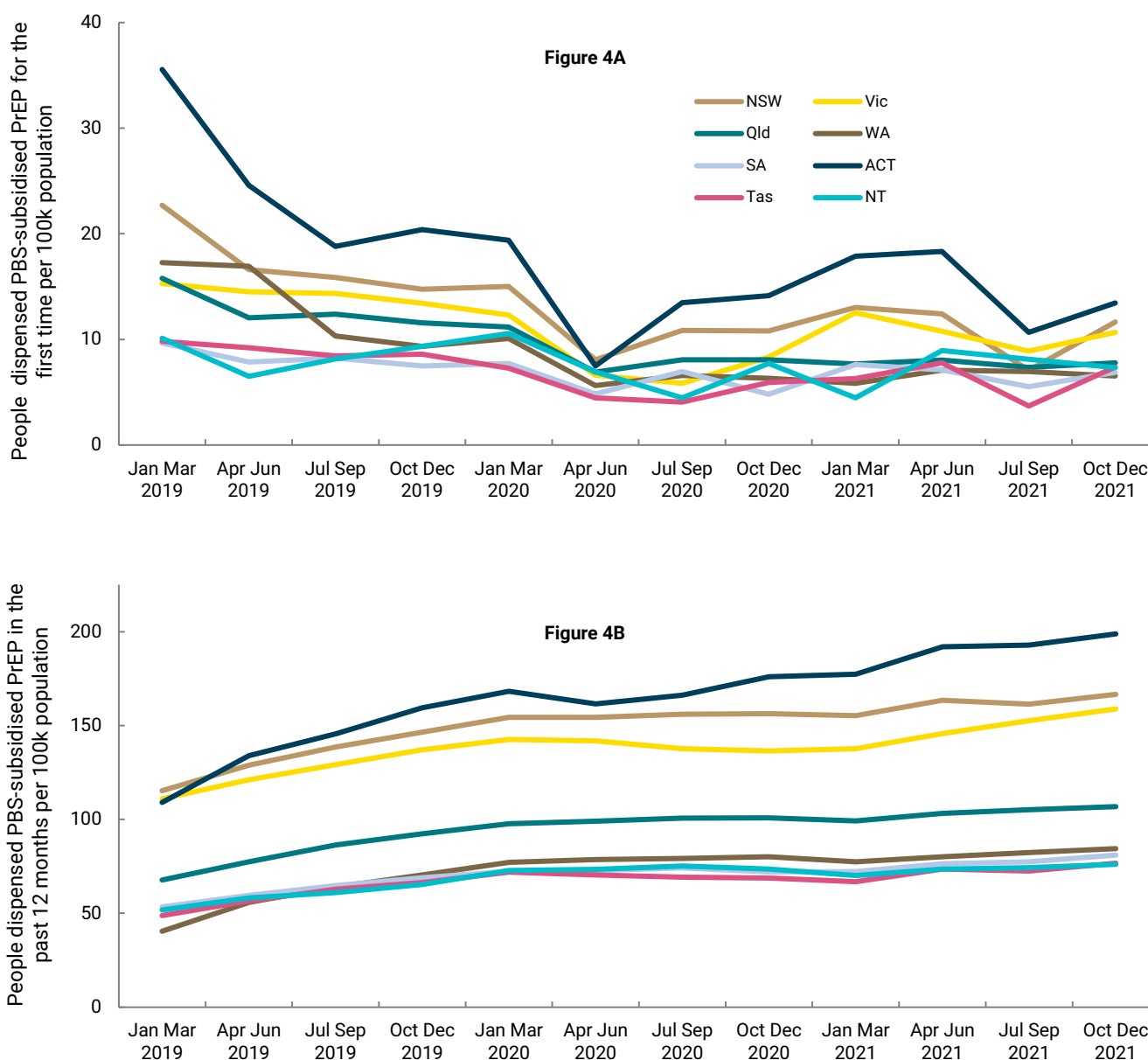
## State and territory

Among people who ever accessed PBS-subsidised PrEP, 39.1% were in NSW, 29.0% in Vic, 16.6% in Qld, 6.7% in WA, 4.4% in SA, 2.4% in ACT, 1.2% in Tas, and 0.6% 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



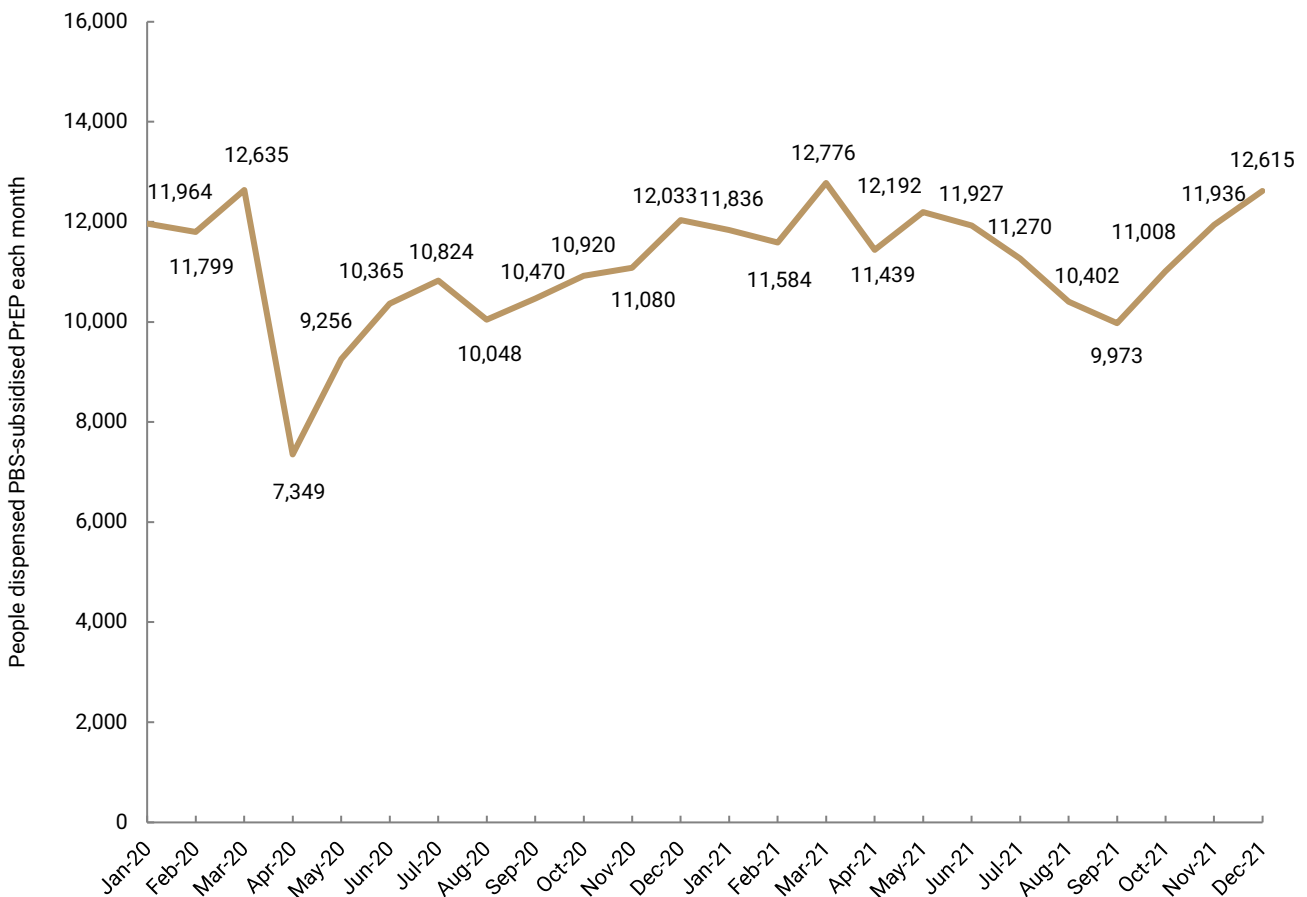


## Special report: Monthly dispensing during COVID-related lockdown periods

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

The number of people dispensed PrEP decreased from 12,635 in March 2020 to 7,349 in April 2020. Over the following months, the numbers increased steadily, with further decreases and recoveries reflecting COVID-19 related lockdowns.

Figure 5: Number of people dispensed PrEP each month between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021.





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.

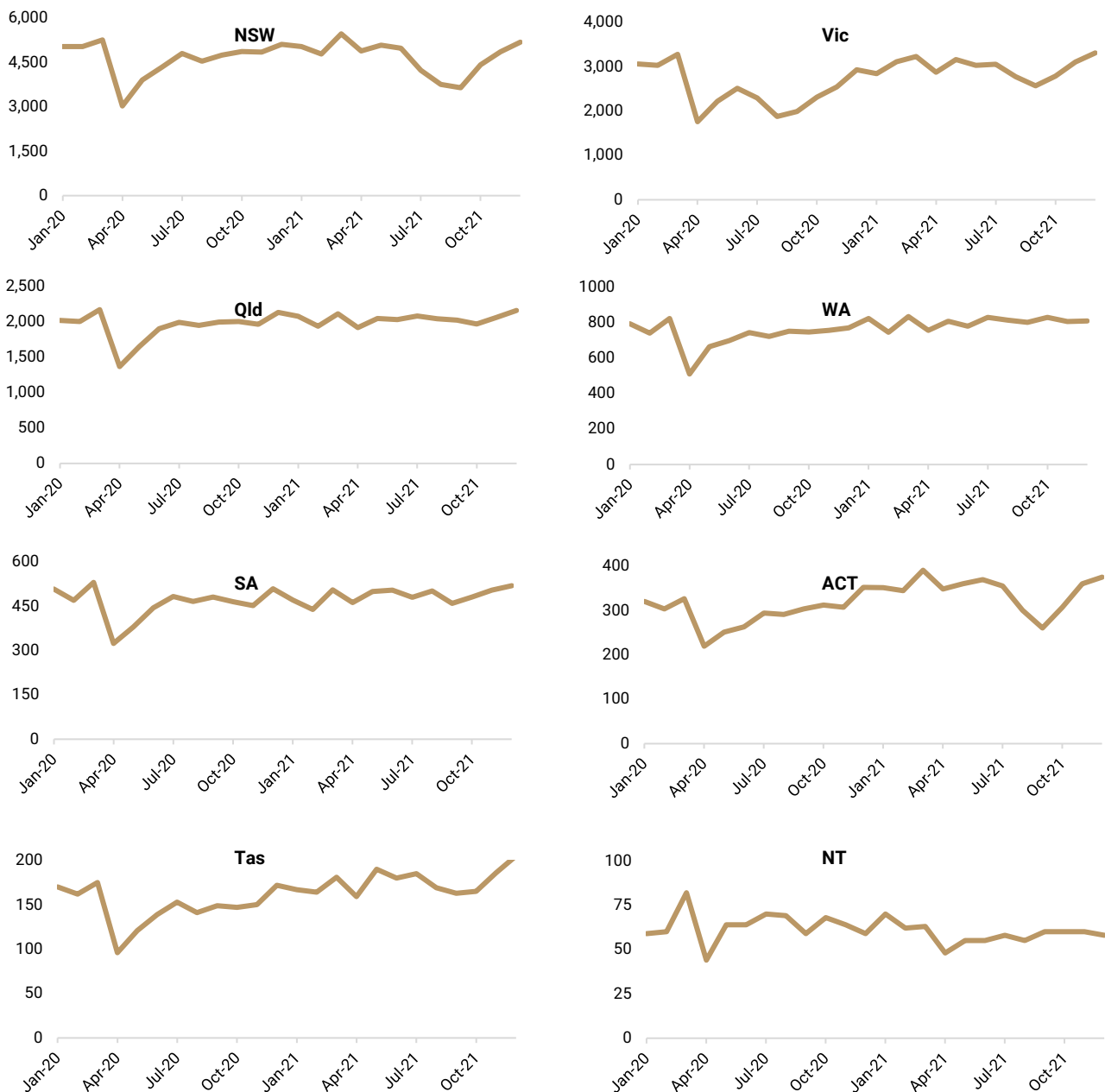
Trends were similar nationally, with the lowest number of people dispensed PrEP occurring in April 2020 for all jurisdictions.

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, likely due to new lockdowns and restrictions.

Figure 6: Number of people dispensed PrEP each month by state/territory of residence, 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021.



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. 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 6% 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, not 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>Source: Gay Community Periodic Surveys, 2021, Centre for Social Research in Health, UNSW Sydney





## 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	1,711	3,608	642	211	164	101	39	45
2018 Q3	4,782	5,147	1,445	394	563	188	127	79
2018 Q4	7,410	6,183	2,623	620	768	311	209	107
2019 Q1	9,239	7,214	3,406	1,053	930	460	259	128
2019 Q2	10,357	7,905	3,914	1,453	1,039	567	301	143
2019 Q3	11,180	8,490	4,384	1,675	1,132	619	335	150
2019 Q4	11,851	9,047	4,704	1,848	1,207	680	355	161
2020 Q1	12,531	9,460	5,003	2,032	1,271	720	385	179
2020 Q2	12,563	9,452	5,085	2,082	1,282	692	379	180
2020 Q3	12,737	9,214	5,197	2,109	1,311	715	374	185
2020 Q4	12,766	9,138	5,216	2,133	1,276	759	372	181
2021 Q1	12,676	9,187	5,143	2,066	1,277	764	361	173
2021 Q2	13,359	9,703	5,363	2,138	1,352	827	398	181
2021 Q3	13,196	10,146	5,477	2,206	1,372	832	393	183
2021 Q4	13,641	10,562	5,578	2,266	1,437	858	415	187

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

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	ACT	Tas	NT
2018 Q2	1,705	3,607	641	211	166	100	38	45
2018 Q3	3,078	1,527	804	186	396	85	86	34
2018 Q4	2,619	1,055	1,171	217	206	127	76	<30
2019 Q1	1,819	993	794	449	168	150	52	<30
2019 Q2	1,334	948	608	441	137	104	49	<30
2019 Q3	1,281	944	629	270	144	80	45	<30
2019 Q4	1,193	885	589	245	131	87	46	<30
2020 Q1	1,219	816	572	266	136	83	39	<30
2020 Q2	657	441	355	149	85	32	<30	<30
2020 Q3	886	391	416	175	123	58	<30	<30
2020 Q4	882	557	417	168	85	61	32	<30
2021 Q1	1,064	836	398	156	135	77	34	<30
2021 Q2	1,015	718	417	189	126	79	42	<30
2021 Q3	578	591	383	186	98	46	<30	<30
2021 Q4	953	710	406	175	122	58	40	<30