

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



Issue #10, May 2024

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 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 2023. The data are de-identified but incorporate unique codes so that data can be presented on the number of unique individuals receiving PrEP, and so that an individual's record of being dispensed PrEP over time can be constructed. 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.

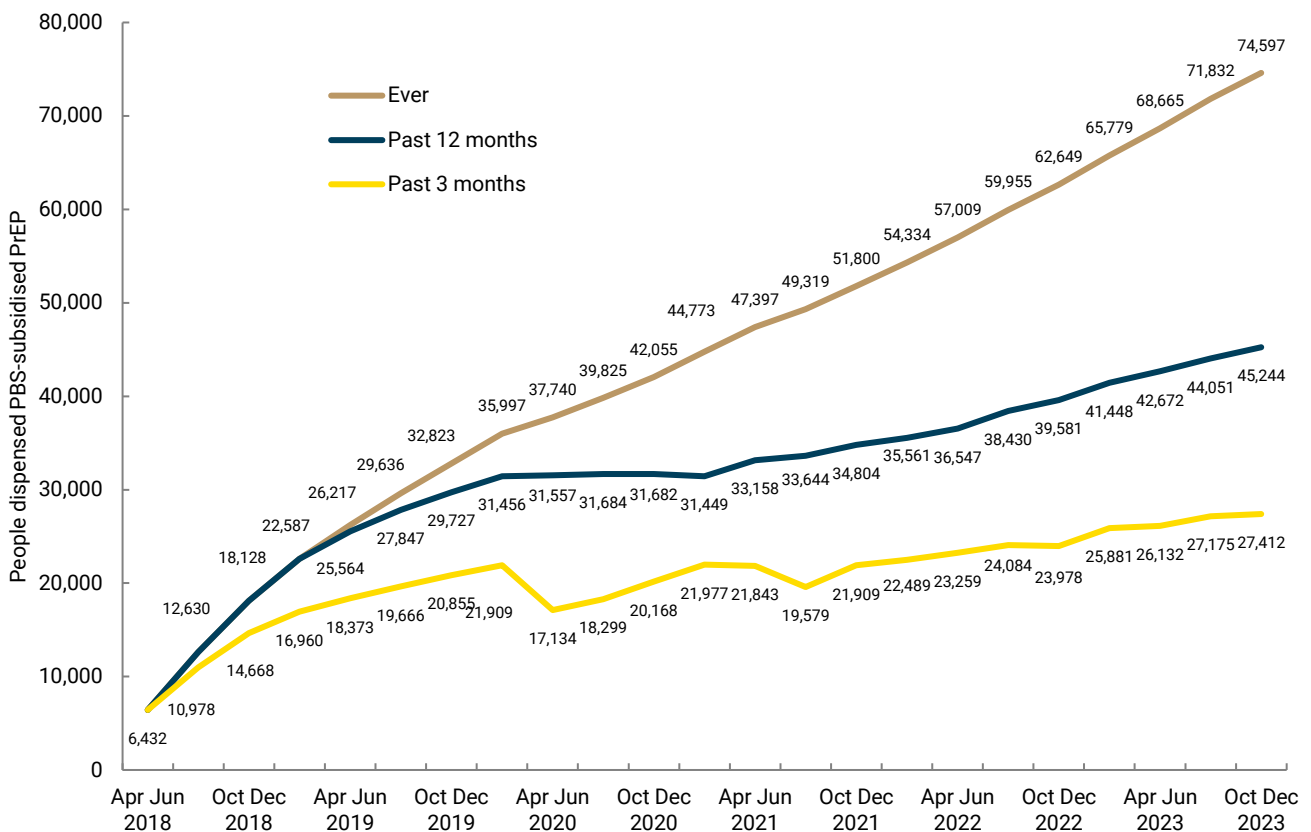


Number of people ever and recently dispensed PrEP

Between 1 April 2018 and 31 December 2023, 74,597 people (97.5% 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 45,244 in Q4 2023.

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





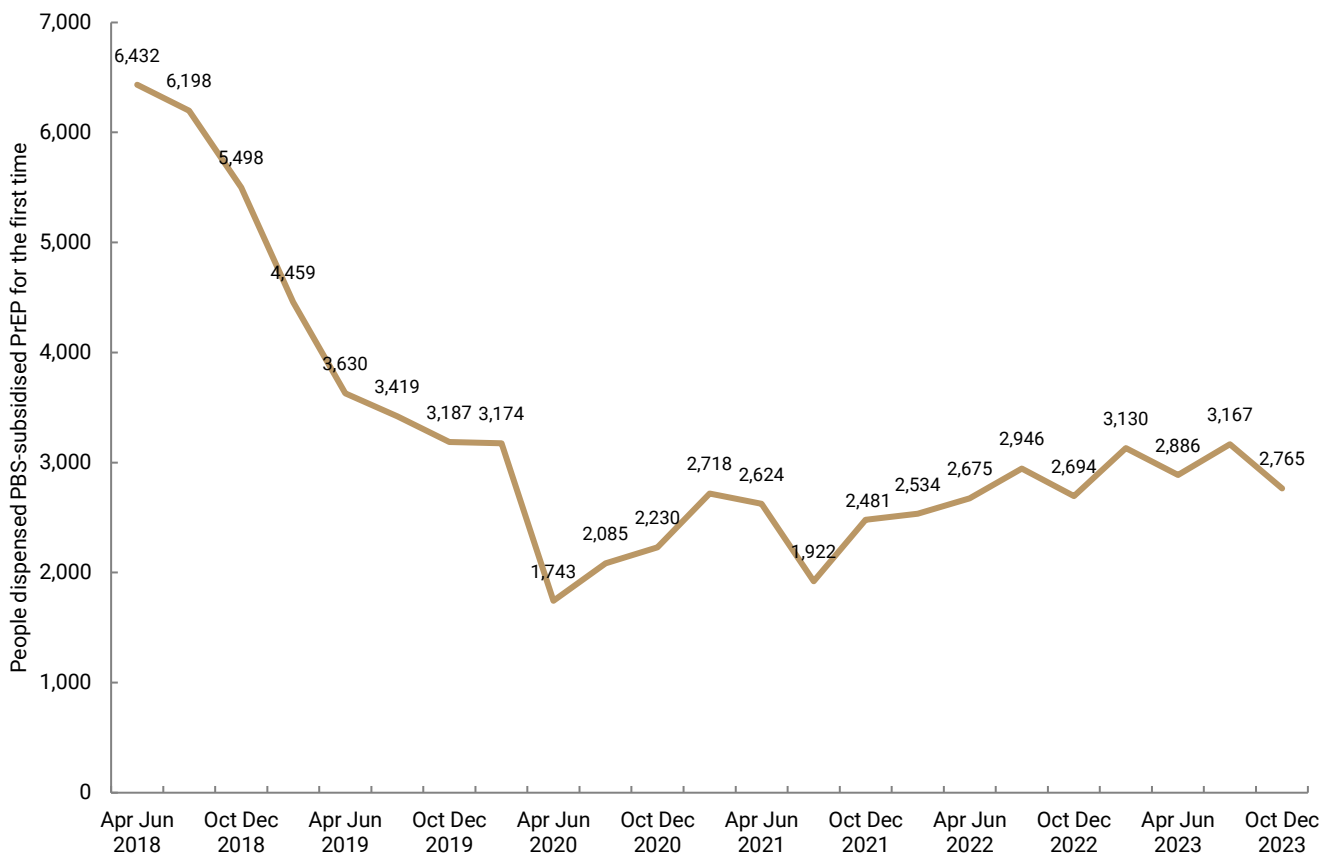
PrEP initiation and prescribers

In the first three months after PBS listing, 6,432 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 74,597 people ever supplied were prescribed their first PBS-subsidised PrEP by 21,017 prescribers; 1.8% (n=373) of prescribers had caseloads of more than 100 PrEP patients. These high-caseload prescribers were responsible for prescribing 57.5% of patients (n=42,684) with their first supplies of PBS-subsidised PrEP.

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





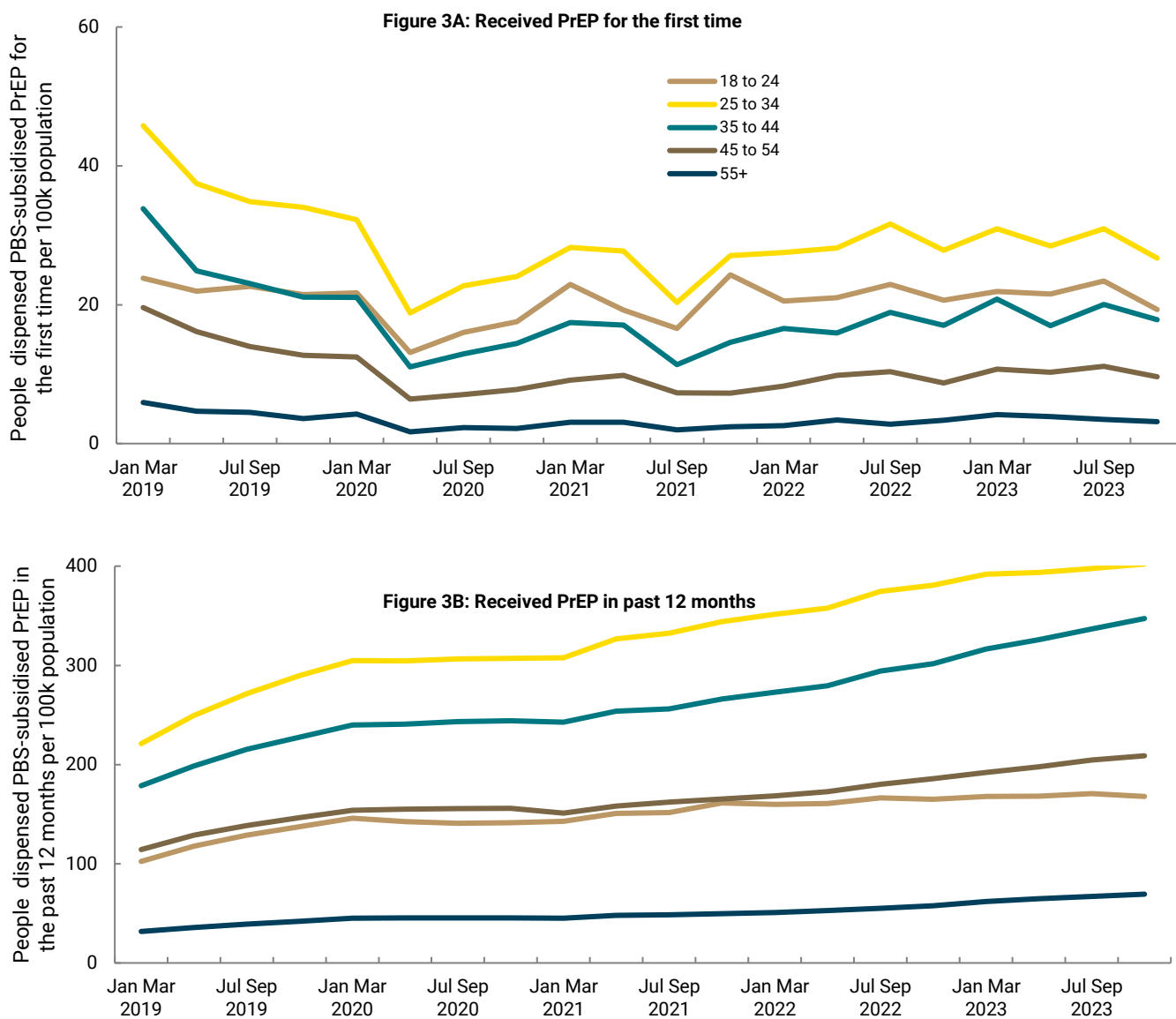
Age

Among people who ever used PBS-subsidised PrEP, 15.6% were 18 to 24, 38.5% were 25 to 34, 23.8% were 35 to 44, 13.2% 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 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 ABS quarterly estimated total Australian population within each age group.



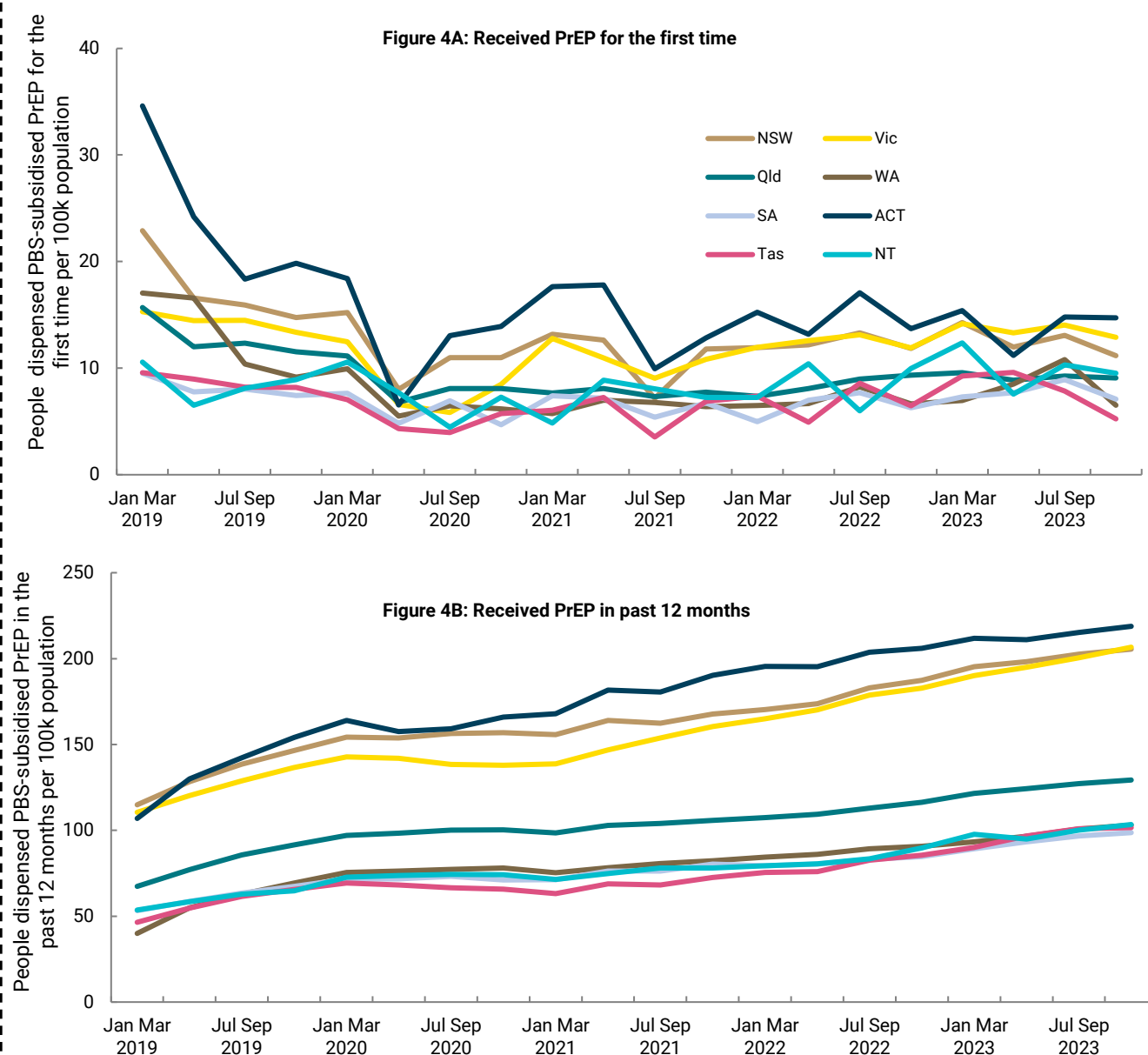
State and territory

Among people who ever accessed PBS-subsidised PrEP, 38.2% were in NSW, 29.4% in Vic, 16.6% in Qld, 7.0% 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 Vic and NSW. 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 ABS quarterly estimated total Australian population by state and territory.



Methods and notes on the dataset

The dataset is provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. 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 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 2023, the Gay Community Periodic Surveys found that 6.7% of gay and bisexual men who were using PrEP purchased it online from overseas pharmacies.¹ 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. Community surveys of gay and bisexual men in 2023 found 28.7% used event-driven (on-demand; 2-1-1) PrEP.¹ 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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¹Gay Community Periodic Surveys, 2023, 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	1,679	3,572	634	200	165	100	37	45
2018 Q3	4,745	5,106	1,438	389	563	185	125	79
2018 Q4	7,362	6,168	2,607	605	768	312	200	106
2019 Q1	9,195	7,159	3,399	1,054	935	461	252	132
2019 Q2	10,317	7,842	3,910	1,454	1,034	564	299	144
2019 Q3	11,156	8,418	4,364	1,674	1,123	620	337	155
2019 Q4	11,826	8,977	4,676	1,854	1,197	676	361	160
2020 Q1	12,478	9,407	4,983	2,029	1,274	722	384	179
2020 Q2	12,480	9,398	5,071	2,067	1,282	698	379	182
2020 Q3	12,684	9,154	5,174	2,098	1,311	708	371	184
2020 Q4	12,709	9,088	5,191	2,126	1,276	740	368	184
2021 Q1	12,613	9,108	5,108	2,057	1,279	752	355	177
2021 Q2	13,273	9,622	5,355	2,144	1,372	817	389	186
2021 Q3	13,155	10,069	5,426	2,219	1,377	817	387	194
2021 Q4	13,567	10,519	5,537	2,268	1,447	860	412	194
2022 Q1	13,804	10,831	5,650	2,331	1,434	885	429	197
2022 Q2	14,142	11,240	5,793	2,388	1,460	890	433	201
2022 Q3	14,941	11,857	6,010	2,495	1,515	931	472	209
2022 Q4	15,382	12,205	6,231	2,553	1,549	947	489	225
2023 Q1	16,109	12,772	6,545	2,646	1,638	977	516	245
2023 Q2	16,452	13,212	6,747	2,765	1,723	980	554	239
2023 Q3	16,904	13,665	6,948	2,905	1,793	1,004	579	253
2023 Q4	17,247	14,190	7,107	2,994	1,835	1,027	583	261

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

Quarter	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	ACT	Tas	NT
2018 Q2	1,679	3,572	634	200	165	100	37	45
2018 Q3	3,066	1,534	804	189	398	85	88	34
2018 Q4	2,617	1,062	1,169	216	205	127	75	<30
2019 Q1	1,833	991	792	449	167	149	52	<30
2019 Q2	1,332	943	609	439	137	105	49	<30
2019 Q3	1,282	946	628	276	142	80	45	<30
2019 Q4	1,189	878	589	245	132	87	45	<30
2020 Q1	1,231	822	572	267	136	81	39	<30
2020 Q2	649	436	351	149	86	<30	<30	<30
2020 Q3	891	386	418	175	124	58	<30	<30
2020 Q4	889	559	418	168	84	62	32	<30
2021 Q1	1,067	840	397	156	133	79	34	<30
2021 Q2	1,023	718	420	191	129	80	41	<30
2021 Q3	580	592	382	186	97	45	<30	<30
2021 Q4	954	710	405	176	121	58	39	<30
2022 Q1	965	784	387	179	90	69	42	<30
2022 Q2	991	830	428	185	127	60	<30	<30
2022 Q3	1,086	871	477	230	140	78	49	<30
2022 Q4	973	794	500	187	115	63	37	<30
2023 Q1	1,177	952	515	197	134	71	53	31
2023 Q2	993	901	481	243	142	52	55	<30
2023 Q3	1,090	956	505	311	165	69	45	<30
2023 Q4	937	885	499	189	132	69	30	<30