

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



Issue #7, October 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 June 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 30 June 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).

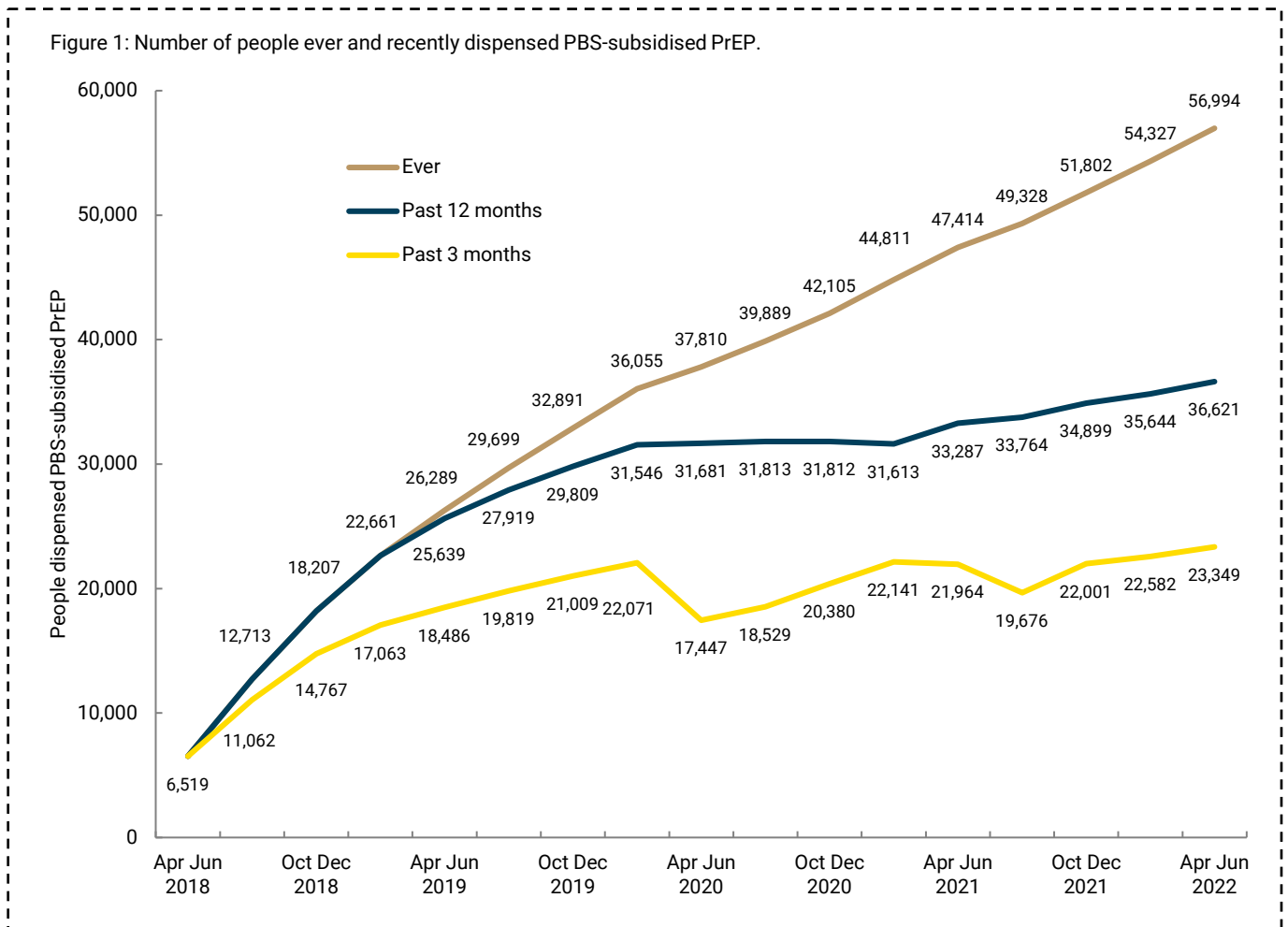
Data are presented on the total number of people who have ever initiated PBS-subsidised PrEP, as well as the number of people dispensed PrEP within each quarter, and within the past 12 months. These data are disaggregated by age, and by state or territory of patient residence, and presented as population 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 30 June 2022, 56,994 people (98.0% 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 36,621 in Q2 2022.





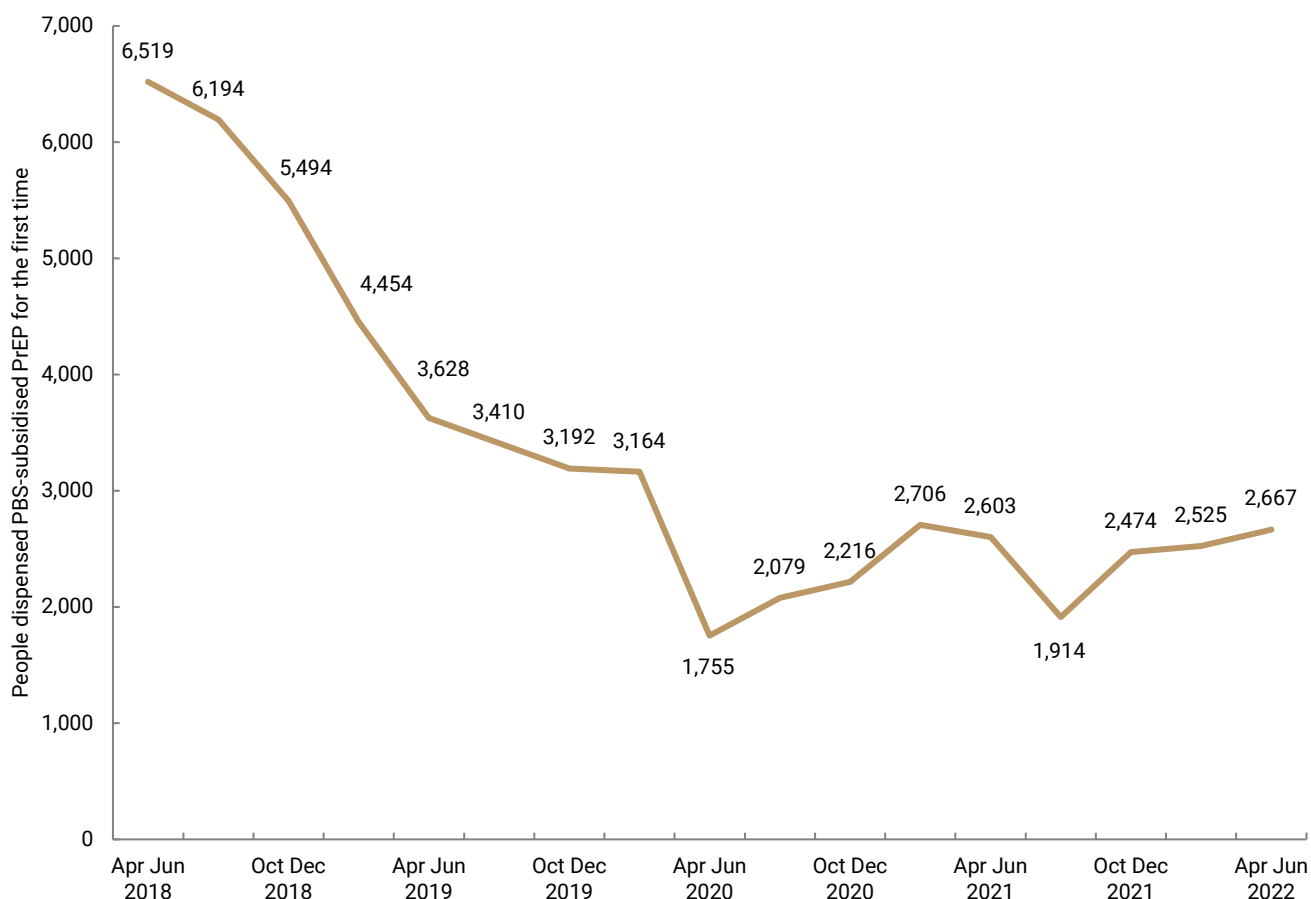
## PrEP initiation and prescribers

In the first three months after PBS listing, 6,519 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 56,994 people ever supplied were prescribed their first PBS-subsidised PrEP by 16,697 prescribers; 1.7% (n=279) of prescribers had caseloads of more than 100 PrEP patients. These high-caseload prescribers were responsible for prescribing 55.9% of patients (n=31,866) with their first supplies of PBS-subsidised PrEP.

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





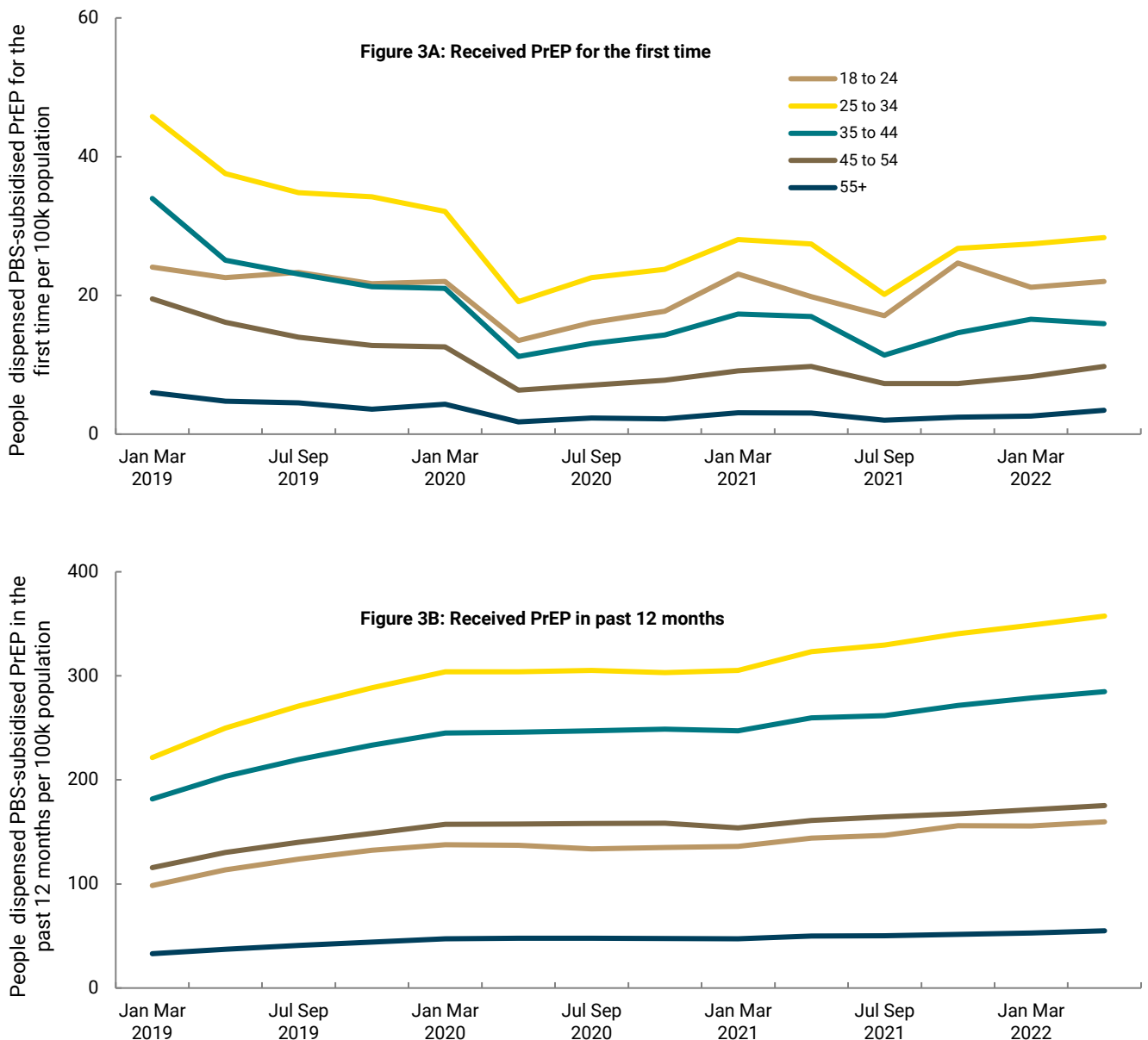
## Age

Among people who ever used PBS-subsidised PrEP, 14.9% were 18 to 24, 38.5% were 25 to 34, 24.0% were 35 to 44, 13.8% 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 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 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 total Australian population within each age group. Total persons (male and female) used in this issue.



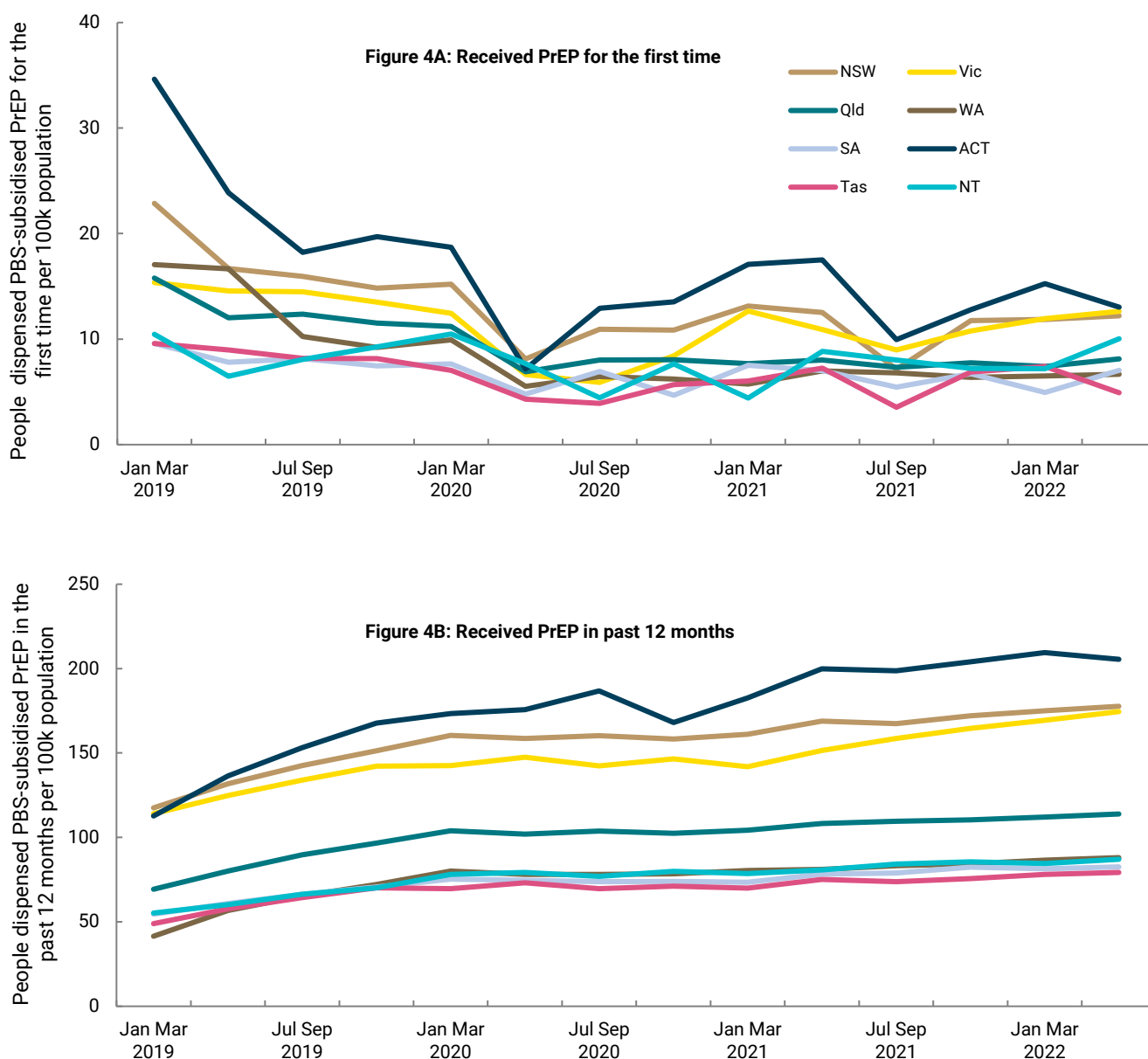
## State and territory

Among people who ever accessed PBS-subsidised PrEP, 39.0% were in NSW, 29.1% in Vic, 16.5% in Qld, 6.8% in WA, 4.3% in SA, 2.4% in ACT, 1.2% 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 total Australian population within each jurisdiction.

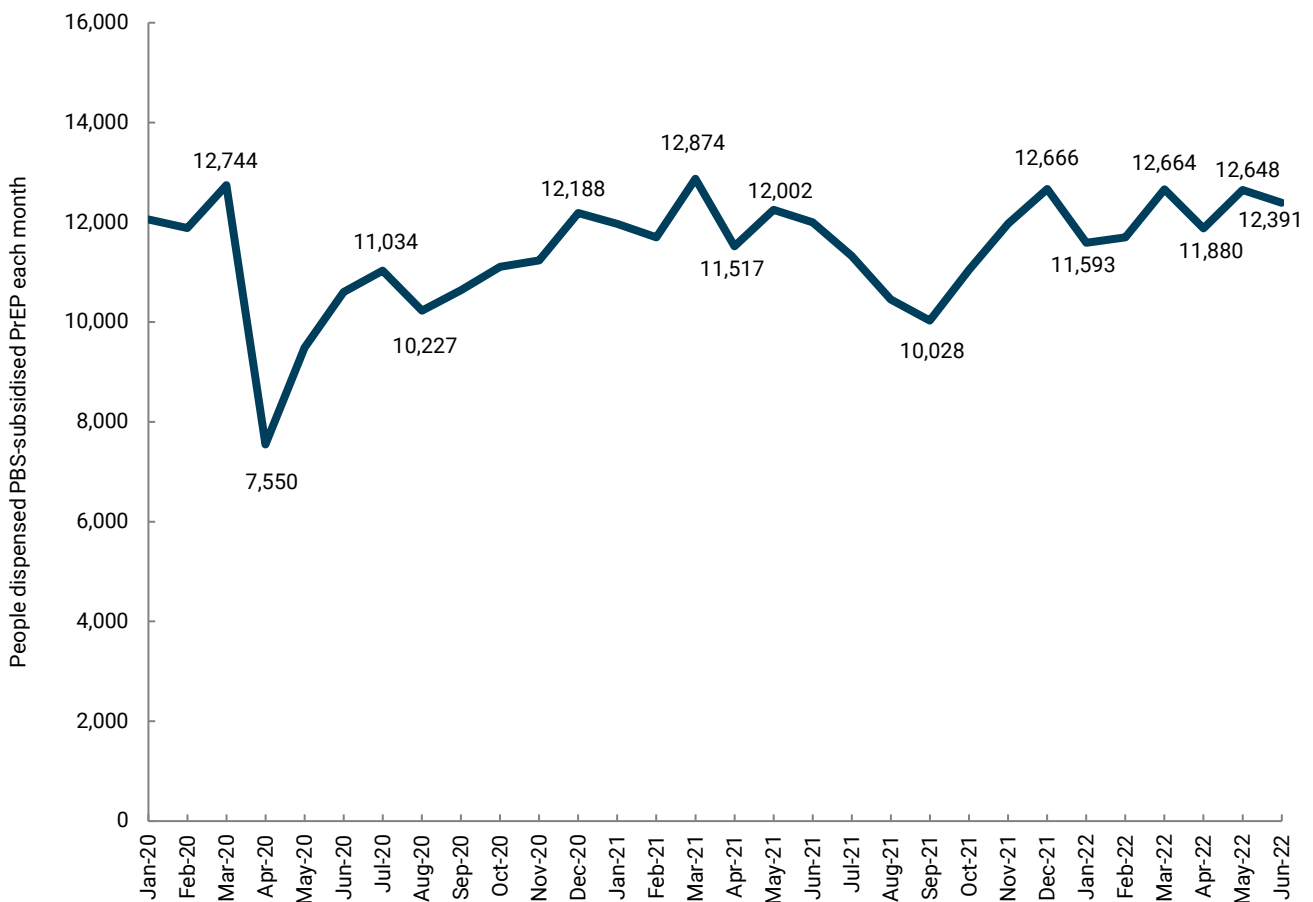


## Special report: Monthly dispensing during COVID-related lockdown periods

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 30 June 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.

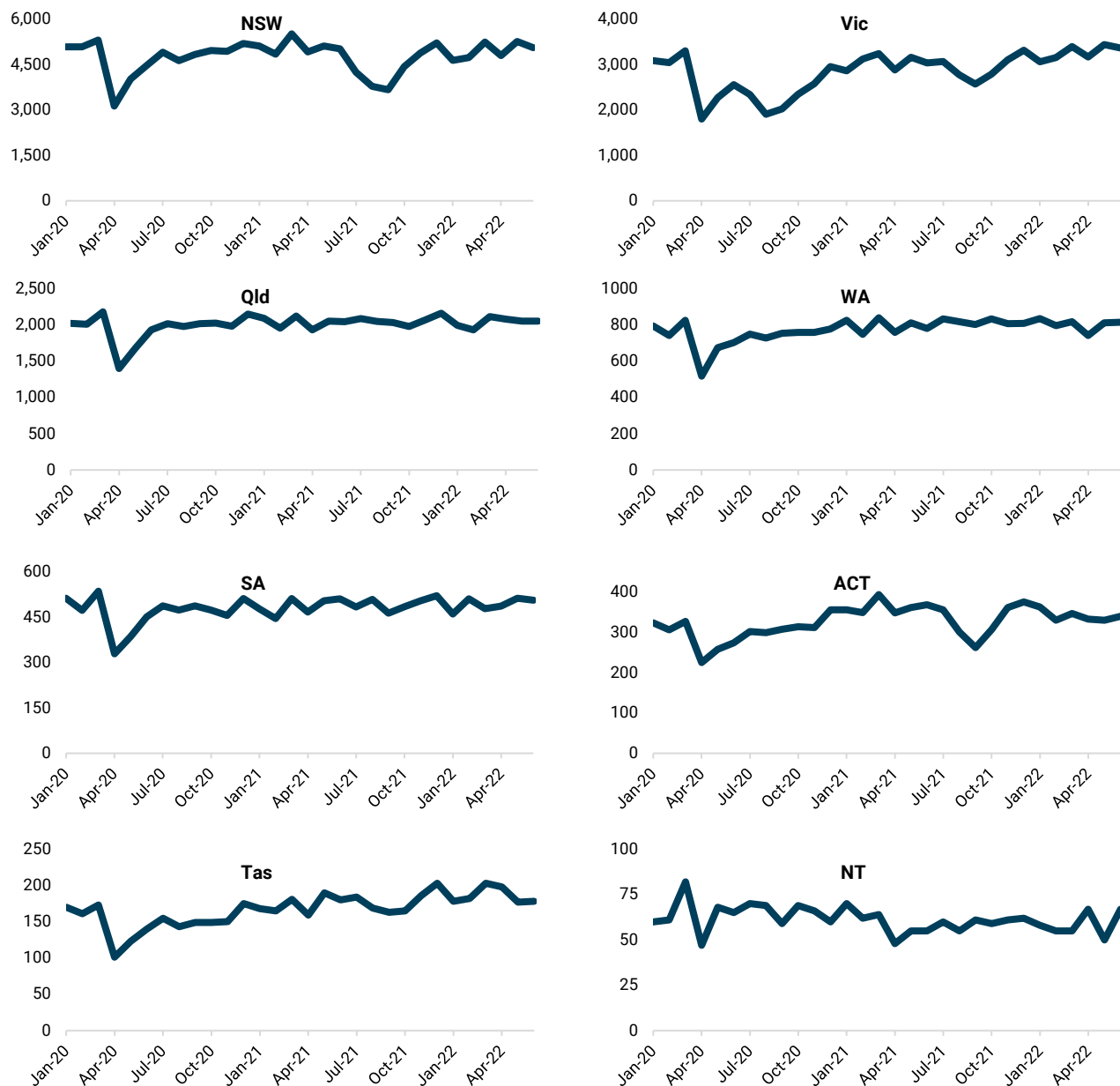
Trends were similar nationally, with the lowest number of people dispensed PrEP occurring in April 2020 for all jurisdictions.

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, 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 30 June 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 from previous newsletters. 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 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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## Suggested citation

Kirby Institute. Monitoring HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) uptake in Australia (Issue 7). Sydney: Kirby Institute, UNSW Sydney; 2022. ISSN: 2653-3820 (Online).

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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	1,714	3,611	647	215	167	103	39	46
2018 Q3	4,820	5,179	1,462	407	568	192	132	81
2018 Q4	7,488	6,279	2,668	632	776	327	212	109
2019 Q1	9,375	7,359	3,489	1,091	956	488	266	137
2019 Q2	10,537	8,077	4,042	1,498	1,070	594	315	149
2019 Q3	11,431	8,717	4,553	1,734	1,172	672	354	164
2019 Q4	12,164	9,292	4,925	1,920	1,251	740	387	174
2020 Q1	12,923	9,354	5,321	2,143	1,336	770	386	194
2020 Q2	12,813	9,715	5,234	2,105	1,329	783	409	196
2020 Q3	12,975	9,414	5,355	2,118	1,322	838	391	191
2020 Q4	12,812	9,683	5,305	2,131	1,325	757	401	199
2021 Q1	13,025	9,342	5,404	2,190	1,317	823	395	196
2021 Q2	13,650	9,943	5,616	2,214	1,407	902	425	201
2021 Q3	13,536	10,396	5,704	2,281	1,420	899	418	210
2021 Q4	13,928	10,782	5,761	2,322	1,485	925	429	213
2022 Q1	14,146	11,088	5,869	2,381	1,468	948	443	211
2022 Q2	14,381	11,454	5,993	2,431	1,491	932	452	217

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	1,709	3,605	643	211	166	101	38	46
2018 Q3	3,079	1,522	804	185	397	85	88	34
2018 Q4	2,622	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	1,192	882	586	245	132	87	45	<30
2020 Q1	1,224	817	573	266	136	83	39	<30
2020 Q2	655	437	354	149	85	32	<30	<30
2020 Q3	886	389	414	175	124	58	<30	<30
2020 Q4	879	556	416	169	84	61	32	<30
2021 Q1	1,062	834	397	156	135	77	34	<30
2021 Q2	1,013	715	416	191	126	79	41	<30
2021 Q3	577	587	381	186	98	45	<30	<30
2021 Q4	952	706	405	175	121	58	39	<30
2022 Q1	958	782	388	179	89	69	42	<30
2022 Q2	988	829	427	184	127	59	<30	<30