

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



Issue #9, November 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 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 30 June 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.

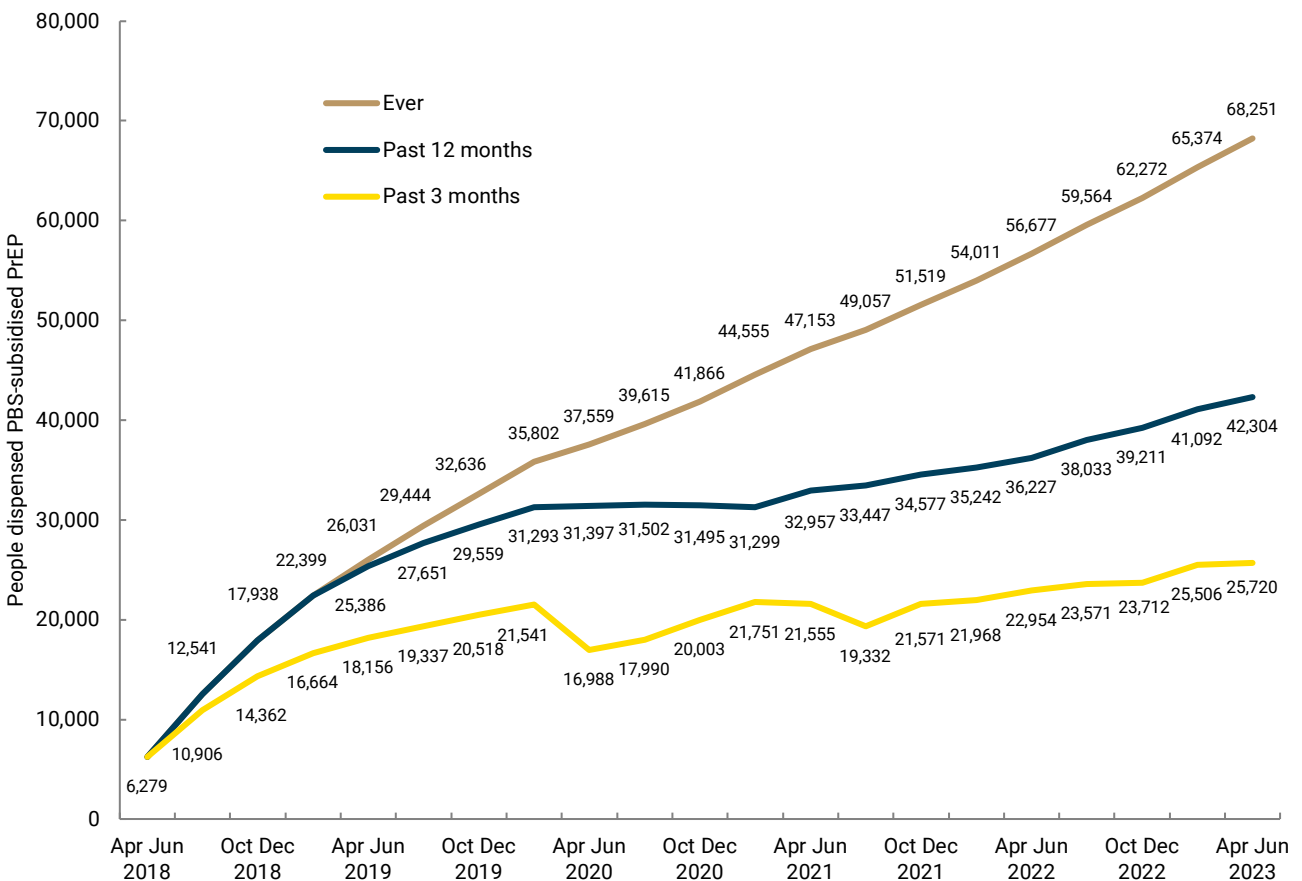


## Number of people ever and recently dispensed PrEP

Between 1 April 2018 and 30 June 2023, 68,251 people (97.7% 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 42,304 in Q2 2023.

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





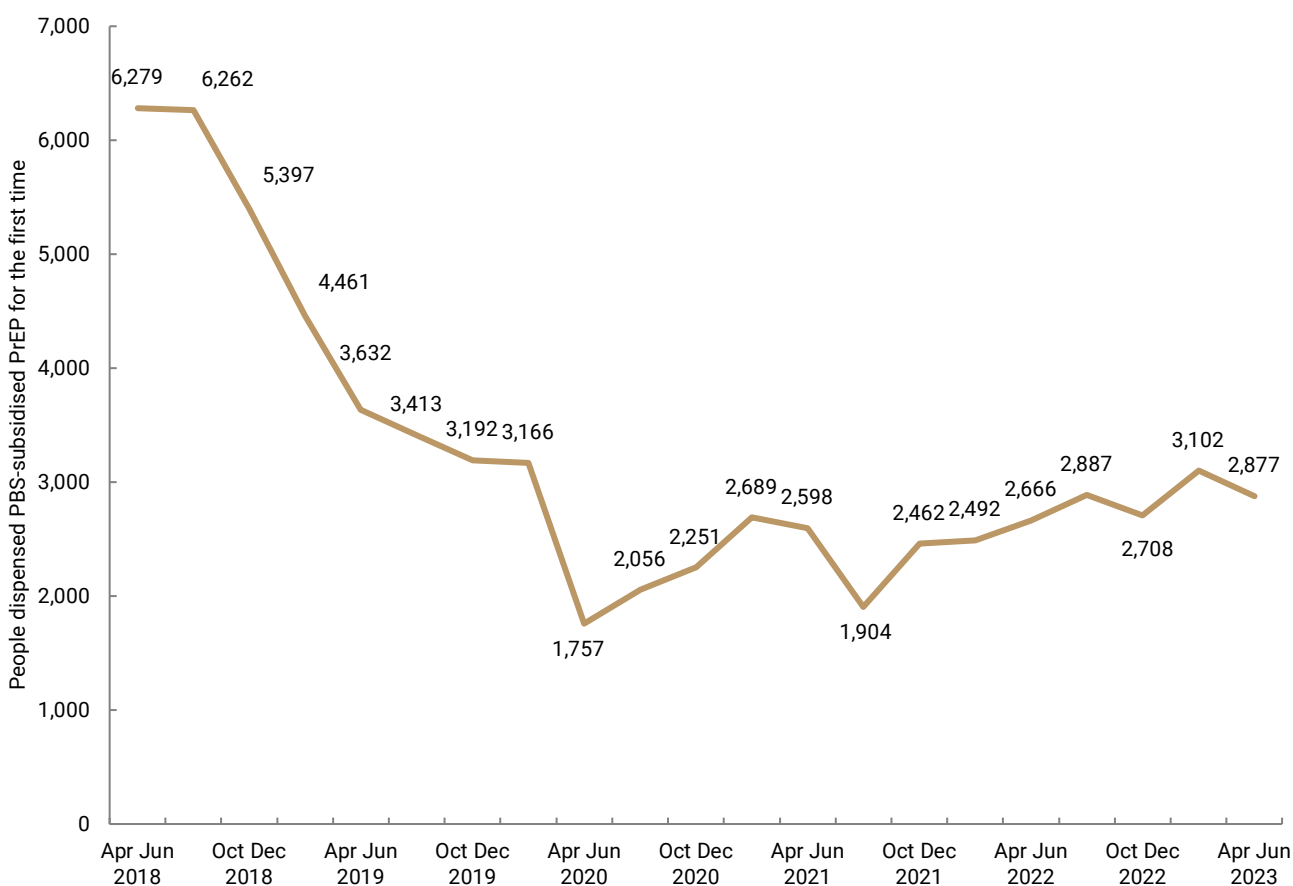
## PrEP initiation and prescribers

In the first three months after PBS listing, 6,279 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 68,251 people ever supplied were prescribed their first PBS-subsidised PrEP by 19,535 prescribers; 1.7% (n=333) of prescribers had caseloads of more than 100 PrEP patients. These high-caseload prescribers were responsible for prescribing 56.6% of patients (n=38,587) with their first supplies of PBS-subsidised PrEP.

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





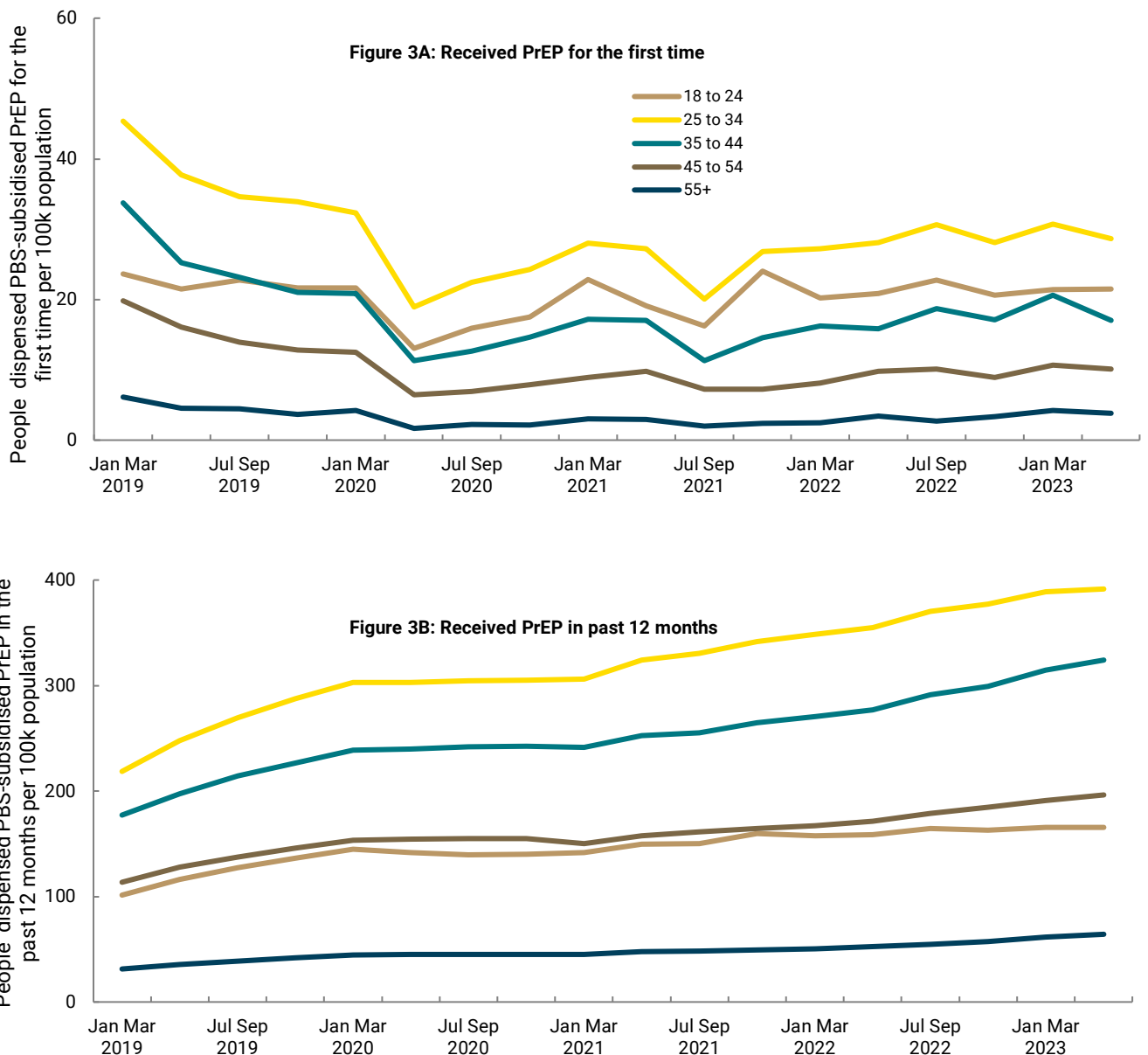
## Age

Among people who ever used PBS-subsidised PrEP, 15.0% were 18 to 24, 38.7% were 25 to 34, 23.9% were 35 to 44, 13.4% 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.



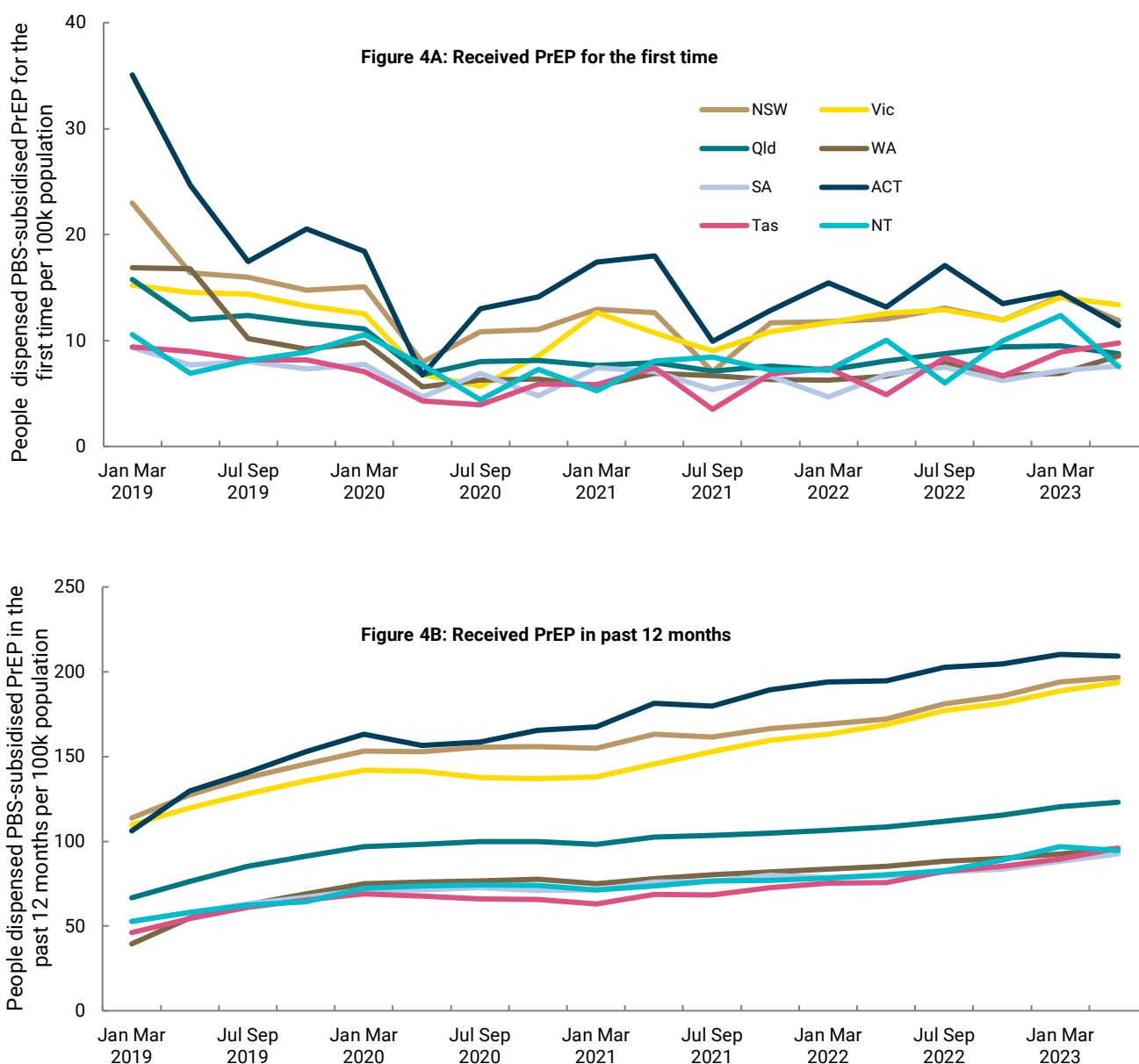
## State and territory

Among people who ever accessed PBS-subsidised PrEP, 38.5% were in NSW, 29.3% 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 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 2022, the Gay Community Periodic Surveys found that 6.2% 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. Community surveys of gay and bisexual men in 2022 found 24.7% used event-driven (on-demand; 2-1-1) PrEP.<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.

## Report authors

Doug Fraser, Nicholas Medland, Hamish McManus, Rebecca Guy, Andrew E Grulich, Curtis Chan, Benjamin R Bavinton

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## Publisher address

The Kirby Institute  
Level 6, Wallace Wurth Building, UNSW Sydney  
Kensington NSW 2052

## Report contacts

Doug Fraser: [dfraser@kirby.unsw.edu.au](mailto:dfraser@kirby.unsw.edu.au)  
Benjamin Bavinton: [bbavinton@kirby.unsw.edu.au](mailto:bbavinton@kirby.unsw.edu.au)

<sup>1</sup>Gay Community Periodic Surveys, 2022, 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 | 1,642  | 3,469  | 629   | 197   | 161   | 100 | 36  | 45  |
| 2018 Q3 | 4,724  | 5,060  | 1,425 | 387   | 558   | 185 | 123 | 79  |
| 2018 Q4 | 7,278  | 6,118  | 2,571 | 598   | 764   | 306 | 199 | 104 |
| 2019 Q1 | 9,118  | 7,107  | 3,366 | 1,043 | 928   | 457 | 250 | 130 |
| 2019 Q2 | 10,229 | 7,802  | 3,878 | 1,449 | 1,026 | 562 | 297 | 143 |
| 2019 Q3 | 11,067 | 8,368  | 4,333 | 1,665 | 1,116 | 613 | 335 | 154 |
| 2019 Q4 | 11,755 | 8,920  | 4,662 | 1,844 | 1,189 | 671 | 359 | 159 |
| 2020 Q1 | 12,406 | 9,359  | 4,966 | 2,015 | 1,269 | 718 | 382 | 178 |
| 2020 Q2 | 12,401 | 9,358  | 5,057 | 2,053 | 1,277 | 693 | 376 | 182 |
| 2020 Q3 | 12,609 | 9,099  | 5,154 | 2,081 | 1,300 | 706 | 369 | 184 |
| 2020 Q4 | 12,625 | 9,029  | 5,164 | 2,115 | 1,274 | 738 | 367 | 183 |
| 2021 Q1 | 12,543 | 9,059  | 5,085 | 2,051 | 1,279 | 750 | 355 | 177 |
| 2021 Q2 | 13,193 | 9,551  | 5,325 | 2,133 | 1,370 | 815 | 388 | 183 |
| 2021 Q3 | 13,080 | 10,002 | 5,395 | 2,205 | 1,374 | 814 | 388 | 190 |
| 2021 Q4 | 13,476 | 10,450 | 5,495 | 2,254 | 1,443 | 856 | 412 | 191 |
| 2022 Q1 | 13,690 | 10,722 | 5,598 | 2,308 | 1,423 | 878 | 429 | 194 |
| 2022 Q2 | 14,013 | 11,141 | 5,740 | 2,368 | 1,446 | 887 | 432 | 200 |
| 2022 Q3 | 14,782 | 11,743 | 5,947 | 2,463 | 1,495 | 926 | 470 | 207 |
| 2022 Q4 | 15,243 | 12,094 | 6,170 | 2,527 | 1,527 | 940 | 487 | 223 |
| 2023 Q1 | 15,982 | 12,661 | 6,482 | 2,622 | 1,621 | 969 | 512 | 243 |
| 2023 Q2 | 16,312 | 13,107 | 6,675 | 2,743 | 1,707 | 972 | 550 | 238 |

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

| Quarter | NSW   | Vic   | Qld   | WA  | SA  | ACT | Tas | NT  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 2018 Q2 | 1,642 | 3,469 | 629   | 197 | 161 | 100 | 36  | 45  |
| 2018 Q3 | 3,082 | 1,591 | 796   | 190 | 397 | 85  | 87  | 34  |
| 2018 Q4 | 2,554 | 1,058 | 1,146 | 211 | 206 | 121 | 76  | <30 |
| 2019 Q1 | 1,840 | 989   | 795   | 445 | 164 | 151 | 51  | <30 |
| 2019 Q2 | 1,319 | 950   | 610   | 444 | 136 | 107 | 49  | <30 |
| 2019 Q3 | 1,287 | 941   | 630   | 272 | 142 | 76  | 45  | <30 |
| 2019 Q4 | 1,191 | 873   | 595   | 246 | 130 | 90  | 45  | <30 |
| 2020 Q1 | 1,221 | 827   | 570   | 264 | 138 | 81  | 39  | <30 |
| 2020 Q2 | 646   | 450   | 351   | 153 | 84  | 30  | <30 | <30 |
| 2020 Q3 | 881   | 376   | 414   | 170 | 124 | 58  | <30 | <30 |
| 2020 Q4 | 894   | 563   | 420   | 174 | 86  | 63  | 33  | <30 |
| 2021 Q1 | 1,049 | 830   | 397   | 155 | 134 | 78  | 33  | <30 |
| 2021 Q2 | 1,025 | 703   | 412   | 189 | 127 | 81  | 42  | <30 |
| 2021 Q3 | 572   | 593   | 372   | 184 | 97  | 45  | <30 | <30 |
| 2021 Q4 | 944   | 711   | 397   | 174 | 120 | 58  | 39  | <30 |
| 2022 Q1 | 954   | 768   | 381   | 174 | 85  | 70  | 42  | <30 |
| 2022 Q2 | 982   | 833   | 429   | 185 | 124 | 60  | <30 | <30 |
| 2022 Q3 | 1,066 | 855   | 468   | 220 | 137 | 78  | 48  | <30 |
| 2022 Q4 | 982   | 796   | 503   | 188 | 114 | 62  | 38  | <30 |
| 2023 Q1 | 1,172 | 943   | 511   | 195 | 132 | 67  | 51  | 31  |
| 2023 Q2 | 986   | 904   | 474   | 245 | 140 | 53  | 56  | <30 |