

ACT Government Budget Consultation 2019-20

Northside Methadone/Suboxone Tier 1 Dosing Point in Canberra

Opioid maintenance treatment (OMT) is a lifesaving treatment for people who are dependent on opioids. Currently, opioid maintenance treatment (OMT) is available at no cost to the patient at the Canberra Hospital in Building 7. For community clients, OMT is available in private pharmacies at a cost of approximately \$15 per week. This cost is subsidised by the ACT Government.

There continue to be opioid related deaths every year in Canberra – so far in 2018, there have been 13 heroin overdoses. There are several barriers to people with opioid addiction receiving appropriate medical care.

The problem:

Patients who live on the Northside of Canberra have limited access to Tier 1 Opioid maintenance treatment provided by ACT Health.

As of 5 October 2018, there were 281 patients from the Northside of Canberra prescribed OMT through ACT Health – 30.2% of all OMT patients. Table 1 provides the breakdown of ACT Health patients currently on OMT.

Suburb	No. Clients	Count of ACTPAS
Central	269	28.9%
North	281	30.2%
NSW	3	0.3%
South	348	37.4%
Unknown	28	3.0%
VIC	1	0.1%
Grand Total	930	100.0%

Issues reported by clients, health professionals, and consumer groups include:

- Transport can make it very difficult for people to dose at the Canberra Hospital; buses are very problematic especially on weekends and public holidays.
- Clients have reported missing doses due to transport problems.
- Clients have ceased, or not accessed, OMT if they live on the Northside due to transport problems.
- Clients have abruptly ceased when released from Alexander Maconochie Centre as unable to access Canberra Hospital.

People likely to benefit from a North side dosing point are those who are the most unstable and most vulnerable.

Examples:

1. New clients who have limited alternatives because they must dose at an ACT Health Tier 1 facility until they are stable before being suitable to go to pharmacy.
2. People recently discharged from custody:
 - they are more likely to have accommodation and transport problems.
 - they are also known to be at a significant increase in risk of death from drug overdose (and other causes) in the first 3-6 months post release.
3. People who are under-resourced generally for accommodation, support networks and transport.

Other clients who would benefit are those who are trying to fit dosing in with work, or family care commitments and have limited time to be able to get to a dosing point and manage their parental, and/or employment obligations.

The solution:

ACT Health must open a Northside Tier 1 dosing point for people to receive Opioid maintenance treatment.

This has previously been flagged as a priority.

This has previously been proposed at the Belconnen Community Health Centre but has not progressed to opening.

This solution is supported by several organisations –the Deep End GPs hosted a meeting to discuss this issue in August 2018. The meeting was attended by ACTCOSS, Healthcare Consumers Association ACT, CAHMA, ATODA, Hepatitis ACT, Directions Health Services, The Pharmacy Guild, Capital Health Network, Justice Health. All organisations agreed at this meeting that this is a priority for patients with opioid dependence in Canberra.

The Deep End GPs of the Canberra Region is a grassroots organisation of GPs who work with at-risk people in Canberra and the surrounding region. Our objectives focus on advocacy, peer support, and learning. Our group has identified a lack of access to OMT on the Northside of Canberra as a significant health issue.

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