



## Topic Brief: Methadone Maintenance in Primary Care

**Date:** 05/10/22

**Nomination Number:** 0973

**Purpose:** This document summarizes the information addressing a nomination submitted on 05/06/22 through the Effective Health Care Website. This information was used to inform the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program decisions about whether to produce an evidence report on the topic, and if so, what type of evidence report would be most suitable.

**Issue:** The nominator is enrolled in a methadone treatment program. They are requesting that primary care providers manage methadone prescriptions and monitoring for patients stable in treatment for two or more years for convenience and to minimize exposures that might lead to relapse.

**Findings:** The AHRQ EPC Program does not develop policies or guidance for clinical care, provide coverage or deliver clinical services, or develop legislation. As such, the focus of this nomination falls outside the purview of the EPC Program.

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### Background

Misuse of opiate prescriptions, illicit opiate use, and risk of overdose is increasing annually. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), in 2020, 9.5 million people older than age 12 had misused heroin or opiate prescription drugs in the past year; 2.7 million people in the United States above age 12 had an opiate use disorder; and 690,000 people misused heroin. Roughly 30 percent of the 2.6 million people receiving treatment for illicit drug use received medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in 2020 for opioid misuse.<sup>1</sup> Patients with opiate use disorder who received MAT were less likely to die of overdose.<sup>2</sup>

Methadone maintenance programs are a form of MAT and are regulated by Federal laws. These laws govern the administration and oversight of methadone maintenance programs. There is no permission for non-maintenance programs to provide methadone for opiate use disorder. There are some allowances for take-home doses of methadone when a patient has demonstrated

stability, which is outlined in the law. Primary care practices can prescribe buprenorphine and oral naltrexone; only SAMHSA-certified opioid treatment programs can prescribe methadone for opioid use disorders.<sup>3</sup>

The nominator may find the AHRQ rapid review “[Retention Strategies for Medications for Addiction Treatment in Adults With Opioid Use Disorder](#)” helpful. This review included research studies of other models of MAT using methadone from other countries, which operate under different policies.<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. US Department of Health and Human Services 2020. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. doi: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/key-substance-use-and-mental-health-indicators-in-the-united-states-results-from-the-2019-national-survey-on-drug-use-and-health/PEP20-07-01-001>.
2. Laroche MR, Bernson D, Land T, et al. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder After Nonfatal Opioid Overdose and Association With Mortality: A Cohort Study. *Ann Intern Med*. 2018 Aug 7;169(3):137-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.7326/m17-3107>. PMID: 29913516.
3. Code of Federal Regulations. National Archives and Records Administration. doi: <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42/chapter-I/subchapter-A/part-8/subpart-C/section-8.12>.
4. Chan B, Gean E, Arkhipova-Jenkins I, et al. Retention Strategies for Medications for Addiction Treatment in Adults With Opioid Use Disorder: A Rapid Evidence Review. Rockville (MD); 2020.

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**Conflict of Interest:** None of the investigators have any affiliations or financial involvement that conflicts with the material presented in this report.

## Acknowledgements

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1. Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. US Department of Health and Human Services 2020. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. doi: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/key-substance-use-and-mental-health-indicators-in-the-united-states-results-from-the-2019-national-survey-on-drug-use-and-health/PEP20-07-01-001>.
2. Larochelle MR, Bernson D, Land T, et al. Medication for Opioid Use Disorder After Nonfatal Opioid Overdose and Association With Mortality: A Cohort Study. *Ann Intern Med*. 2018 Aug 7;169(3):137-45. doi: <https://doi.org/10.7326/m17-3107>. PMID: 29913516.
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4. Chan B, Gean E, Arkhipova-Jenkins I, et al. Retention Strategies for Medications for Addiction Treatment in Adults With Opioid Use Disorder: A Rapid Evidence Review. Rockville (MD); 2020.