

Trends in fentanyl availability, use, and harms in Australia

Authors: AMY PEACOCK¹, LOUISA DEGENHARDT¹, RAIMONDO BRUNO², PAUL DIETZE^{3,4}, SIMON LENTON⁵, ROSA ALATI⁶, AMANDA ROXBURGH¹, JULIA UPOROVA¹, RACHEL SUTHERLAND¹, ANTONIA KARLSSON¹, DAISY GIBBS¹, MICHAEL FARRELL¹

¹ National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, ²School of Psychology, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, ³Centre for Population Health, Burnet Institute, Melbourne, Australia, ⁴School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, ⁵National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University, Perth, Australia, ⁶Faculty of Medicine and Social Sciences, University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia

Presenter's email: Amy.Peacock@unsw.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: Increasing rates of overdose involving fentanyl are causing considerable concern in North America. These concerns are amplified with increasing availability of illicitly manufactured fentanyl analogues. There has been no recent triangulation of data across various indicators to understand trends in pharmaceutical fentanyl use and harms in Australia, nor to identify evidence of illicitly manufactured fentanyl analogue availability or use.

Method: Data are drawn from various sources to explore trends over time in fentanyl availability, use and harms in Australia. These include data from the online darknet marketplaces; annual interviews with people who regularly inject drugs (Illicit Drug Reporting System; IDRS); needle-syringe program client visits; and from the National Coronial Information System.

Results: Fentanyl comprises a small market share on darknet marketplaces relative to other illicit substances (e.g., cannabis and other pharmaceuticals); non-pharmaceutical fentanyl is available but few Australian vendors have these products listed. Around one-tenth of the IDRS sample have reported last six-month use of pharmaceutical fentanyl preparations in annual interviews since 2013, with even fewer reporting recent injection. A higher percentage reporting recent use has been observed in certain jurisdictions (e.g., New South Wales) more recently. Number of needle-syringe programme visits where clients report injecting fentanyl has increased but remains a small proportion of total visits. Analyses of fentanyl-related deaths are underway.

Discussions and Conclusions: Pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical forms of fentanyl are available on darknet marketplaces, although there is evidence of limited availability from Australian vendors. Data from people who inject drugs suggest stable (IDRS data) or slightly increasing (needle-syringe programme data) rates of use nationally, although jurisdiction level variation is evident.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The Drug Trends Program at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service Improvement Grants Fund. AP, LD, MF, and RB have received investigator-driven untied educational grants from Mundipharma, Seqirus, Reckitt Benckiser, and/or Indivior for work unrelated to this study, namely projects related to post-marketing surveillance studies of opioids and development of an opioid-related behaviour scale. PD has received funding from Gilead Sciences Inc for work unrelated to this study. PD has received funding from Reckitt Benckiser for work unrelated to this study. PD is the recipient of an NHMRC Senior Research Fellowship. SL is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Substance Misuse Prevention and Service

Improvement Grants Fund through its core funding of The National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

