

# Reducing Barriers to Lifesaving Treatment:



**ASAM**

American Society of  
Addiction Medicine

## Topline Findings from ASAM's Pharmacy Access Survey

### Introduction

In 2020, an estimated 9.5 million people in the United States misused opioids (representing 3.4% of the population aged 12 or older), including 9.3 million people who misused pain relievers, and 902,000 who used heroin.



**9.5 million**  
people in the United States  
misused opioids in 2020

*Further, the 2020 National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that 2.7 million persons in America over age 12 met DSM-5 criteria for opioid use disorder (OUD).*

**Buprenorphine is an evidence-based treatment for OUD.** As a partial opioid agonist, buprenorphine's pharmacological properties help to diminish the effects of physical dependency to opioids (e.g., withdrawal symptoms) including:



Decreased  
cravings



Increased  
safety in cases  
of overdose



A lower  
potential for  
opioid misuse.

### The treatment of OUD with buprenorphine is tightly regulated.



The Drug Addiction Treatment Act of 2000 (DATA 2000) established a process allowing only specially qualified practitioners to obtain waivers to prescribe buprenorphine outside of opioid treatment programs (OTPs).



To expand access to buprenorphine for OUD treatment, practitioner eligibility to obtain a DATA waiver was subsequently extended to nurse practitioners and physician assistants under the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) and the Substance Use Disorder Prevention Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act.



Further, in April 2021, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued guidelines exempting 30 patient waiver practitioners from certain federal requirements, such as those related to training, counseling, and other ancillary services.

# Pharmacy Access Survey: Methodology and Responses

This survey was commissioned by ASAM's Practice Management and Regulatory Affairs Committee (PMRAC).

Active from **February 3, 2020 – September 20, 2022**, the survey:

INCLUDED  
**191**  
RESPONDENTS

FROM  
**32**  
STATES

- An overwhelming majority of responses were received in 2022.
- Responses were informed by self-reports of prescribers with increasing difficulties filling their prescriptions at pharmacies.
- Respondents were allowed to leave individual questions unanswered. As a result, response volumes vary from question to question.

## Key Takeaways from the Survey

The most common pharmacy obstacles reported by prescribers were:

**45%** Pharmacy or pharmacist declined to fill the prescription for buprenorphine.

**41%** Pharmacy was unable to fill the prescription for buprenorphine due to an inadequate stock of the prescribed medication.

According to prescribers, the most common reasons pharmacies/pharmacists ***declined*** to dispense buprenorphine were:

**16%** Concern that the prescription was clinically inappropriate.

**25%** Corporate policy limiting or prohibiting dispensing of medication.

**14%** Believing that the DEA has a cap on the quantity of buprenorphine that can be dispensed.

The most common reason pharmacies/pharmacists were ***unable*** to dispense buprenorphine due to inadequate stock:

**41%** Supplier shortage of medications.

**25%** The pharmacy's wholesale supplier has limited the amount of the medication that the pharmacy may order or stock.

## Key Takeaways from the Survey, cont.



**65%** of respondents reported that their patients had to get their buprenorphine prescriptions filled at a different pharmacy.

**60%** of respondents said patients had to **wait more than 24 hours** to receive their buprenorphine prescription.

- This includes **almost a quarter** of respondents who said their patients had to **wait 24-48 hours**.
- And more than **a quarter** who reported **delays of more than 48 hours** for their buprenorphine RX.



**96%** of reports involved large, national retail chain pharmacies

**77%** report that **this is not the first time** they have dealt with pharmacies or pharmacists being unable or unwilling to fill buprenorphine prescriptions

**49%**

Together, 49% of reports originated from five states:



Indiana



Florida



Texas



Tennessee



Illinois

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