

5 February 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: OIA request - Methadone dispensing

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received 8 January 2021 seeking information from Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) about methadone dispensing.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services.

Waitematā is the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country, serving a population of around 650,000 across the North Shore, Waitakere and Rodney areas. We are the largest employer in the district, employing around 8,500 people across more than 80 locations.

In addition to providing services to our own population, we are also the metropolitan Auckland provider of forensic psychiatry, child disability services, child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

We have interpreted your request to be about methadone dispensing, as distinct from methadone prescribing. Methadone dispensing occurs via community pharmacies in the Waitematā district.

In response to your request, we are able to provide the following information:

1. Methadone dispensings by calendar year, for the years of 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016?

The information requested can be found on the Ministry of Health (MoH) website by following the steps set out below:

- visit <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/pharmaceutical-data-web-tool>
- click on the following link: [Pharmaceutical data web tool: full data set \(Zip, 4.7 MB\)](#)
- download the "Data_ByChemical.csv" file
- refer to information related to "methadone hydrochloride" for metro Auckland DHBs Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitematā for 2016-2019.

The 2020 information for methadone dispensing has not yet been published on the MoH website and is available for the first three quarters only. This is because community pharmacies have up to three months to submit the electronic claim after the date the medicine is dispensed.

Methadone dispensings for the first three quarters of 2020 were:

Methadone hydrochloride dispensings			
	Q1 Jan-Mar 2020	Q2 Apr-Jun 2020	Q3 Jul-Sept 2020
Waitematā DHB	33,920	34,576	34,407

2. The longest consecutive period of time a person has been dispensed methadone through the DHB (if known by patient NHI) as of 2020.

We do not hold this information in a central database. The DHB funds community pharmacies to dispense methadone to clients who reside in the Waitematā DHB catchment. This funding is linked to the individual regardless of which pharmacy supplies the medicine in New Zealand.

There are, therefore, limitations in providing an accurate response as individual pharmacies will not hold records about an individual person's on-going methadone use.

Furthermore, patients may move to pharmacies outside the Waitematā DHB area for various reasons such as holidays or relocation.

We are, therefore, refusing your request under Sections 18(e) of the Official Information Act 1982 because the information requested does not exist.

The DHB considered whether this information could be provided from a prescribing rather than a dispensing perspective. However, providing this information would require the review of individual clinical records of patients.

Due to the sensitivity of this information, frontline clinical staff would need to review individual clinical files and it would not be appropriate to use a contractor to review the records. This would take the frontline staff away from their clinical work and prejudice our ability to provide core clinical services.

We have considered whether charging or extending the timeframe for providing the information would assist us in managing this work and have concluded it would not.

We are, therefore, refusing that aspect under Sections 18(f) of the Official Information Act 1982 due to substantial collation or research.

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to seek a review is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

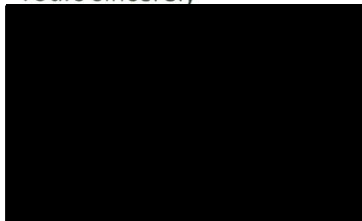
I trust that the information we have been able to provide is helpful.

Waitematā DHB supports the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare.

This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider your views.

Yours sincerely



Director Funding
Waitematā District Health Board