

Disparities in Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines

A Healthy Metric 2022 Brief Report for Wisconsin



Healthy Metric

Advancing Health Equity in Wisconsin

Report Goal

Our goal is to determine how often opioids and benzodiazepines are used at the same time by comparing rates across Wisconsin counties and by age groups.

About Healthy Metric

Healthy Metric is a partnership between UW-Madison, the Medical College of Wisconsin, Marshfield Clinic Research Institute, the Wisconsin Collaborative for Healthcare Quality, and the Wisconsin Health Information Organization that aims to eliminate health disparities in Wisconsin through collaboration, measurement, and interventions.

About the Measure

Use of opioids and benzodiazepines: The percentage of individuals with concurrent use of opioids and benzodiazepines for greater than or equal to 30 cumulative days during the measurement year. This measure is endorsed by the Pharmacy Quality Alliance (PQA).

Measure Goal

Lower rates are better.

Data



Data includes individuals from the Wisconsin Health Information Organization (WHIO) who have prescription claims for opioids in 2019, 2020, or 2021.

Funders



Contact

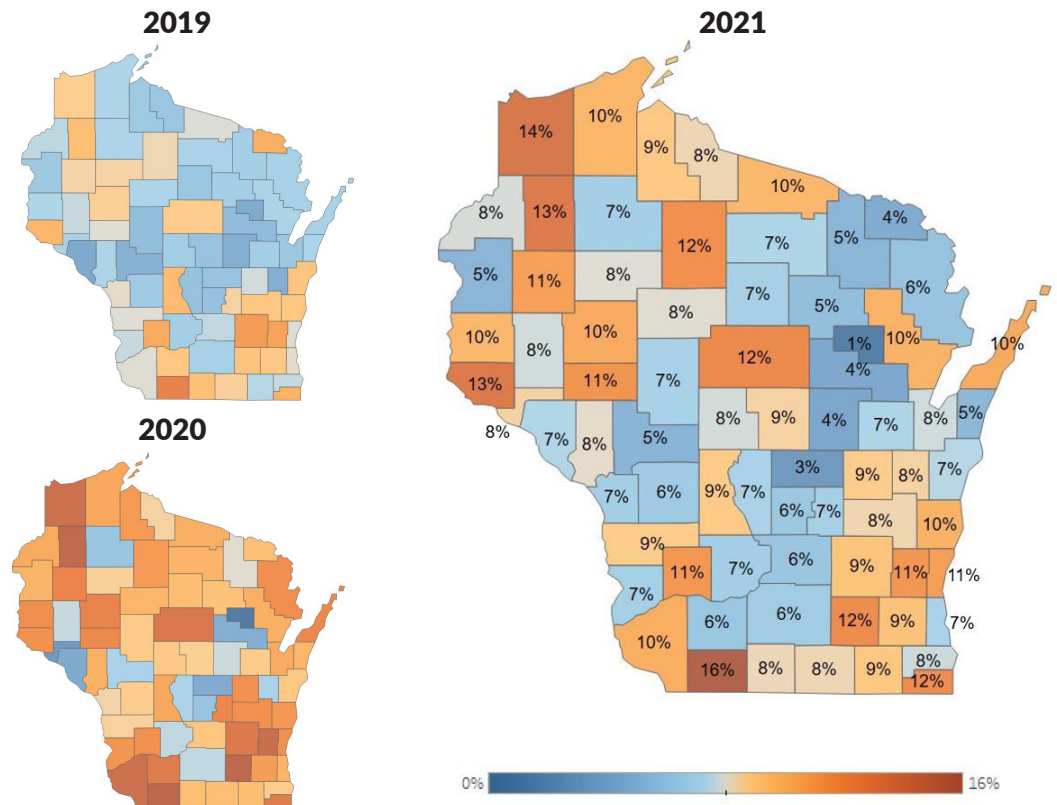
For more information about Healthy Metric, visit: www.healthymetric.org

Executive Summary

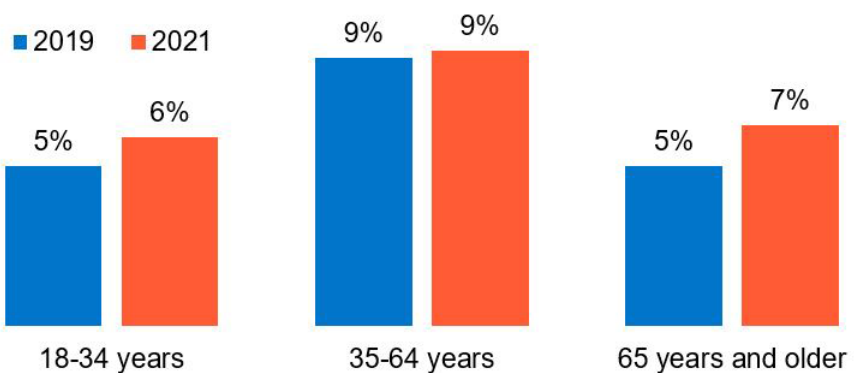
There was an increase in the use of opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time when COVID-19 entered Wisconsin, a trend that began to reverse in 2021.

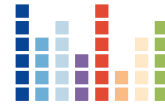
- Across Wisconsin counties, simultaneous use of these medications varies substantially, from as low as 1% up to 16%.
- Middle aged adults are experiencing the highest use of opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time. To date, efforts to reduce the concurrent use of these medications have focused on older adults.

Concurrent Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines by County



Concurrent Use of Opioids and Benzodiazepines by Age





Background

Benzodiazepines for conditions such as anxiety or insomnia and opioids for pain management may lead to safety risks even when only one medication is used. When used at the same time, there is an increased risk of accidents such as falls, and unintentional overdose deaths due to respiratory depression. The CDC recommends that clinicians should avoid prescribing opioids and benzodiazepines at the same time whenever possible. Improving the way opioids and benzodiazepines are prescribed helps patients to recover better or manage longer-term illnesses in a safe manner while reducing these risks.

Health Disparities Indicators

Geography and age can be important contributors to health disparities. Characteristics of geographic areas (e.g., built and natural environment, clinical care practices and services offered, and social and economic conditions) differ across the state. Using geography as an indicator to evaluate health disparities at the community, county, or regional level is helpful in determining if disparities exist in the state, and if so, where. Age is associated with a wide range of factors such as frailty and cognitive decline that increase health risks and can highlight differences in how care is delivered.

Taking Action

Resources for Taking Action to Reduce Disparities

- [Prescribing Opioids: Resources for providers](#)
- [Opioid Crisis and Pain Management](#)
- [Improving Opioid Prescribing Policy Brief](#)
- [What Works for Health: Opioid Prescribing](#)
- [The Community Guide: Opioid Prescribing](#)

Questions to Consider for Taking Action

- Are all providers and patients aware of the risks of concurrent use of opioids and benzodiazepines?
- Are some patients more likely to be prescribed opioids than explore/have access to other pain relief solutions (e.g., surgery or physical therapy)?
- What are some of the barriers to accessing mental healthcare?
- What social and environmental factors contribute to anxiety, insomnia, and other health conditions that are treated with benzodiazepines?

About the Funders

Advancing A Healthier Wisconsin Endowment (AHW): Driven by a vision for a healthier Wisconsin, the Advancing a Healthier Wisconsin Endowment reaches statewide, propelling the most promising work and ideas to build a healthier Wisconsin for generations to come.

Wisconsin Partnership Program (WPP): WPP represents a far-reaching commitment by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health to greatly improve the health of people in Wisconsin for years to come.

Healthy Metric is a partnership between:

