

Ohio has room to expand medication-assisted opioid treatment

March 16 2022, by Denise Blough



Buprenorphine is one of the drugs that is most effective at treating opioid dependency. Credit: Oregon Health & Science University

Medication-assisted treatment is among the most effective approaches to treat opioid dependency, but not as many Ohio clinicians who could be

administering drugs like buprenorphine or naltrexone are doing so, found a recent study in the *Ohio Journal of Public Health*.

Medications have long been used to help patients struggling with addiction through withdrawal or to prevent overdose. And in 2016, the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act gave [nurse practitioners](#) and physician assistants greater authority to administer these treatments.

But the new research found that physicians still make up nearly 60% of medication-assisted treatment providers in the state. The study, led by Ariana Pitcher, a 2021 alumna of the Ohio State College of Public Health, also identified several high-need counties that likely have an inadequate workforce to address the [opioid crisis](#).

"Not only is there a stronger need for more [mental health resources](#) in this country, but we are experiencing a strain on the physician workforce in both supply and capacity to meet this demand. Training more nurse practitioners and physician assistants to administer this treatment could potentially fill a huge gap in the availability of mental health resources for those struggling with opioid misuse," Pitcher said.

The study looked at [opioid overdose deaths](#) and the scope of medication-assisted treatment providers across Ohio's 88 counties.

"Ohio is in the top five states for opioid-involved overdose deaths, and the main purpose of this study was to see if Ohio's current infrastructure is sufficient to meet the needs of reducing opioid-related mortality," said Pitcher, who completed the research as an [undergraduate student](#) under health services management and policy professor Wendy Xu.

On average, the state had 13.9 providers per 100,000 people. While counties with more opioid overdose deaths generally had a higher density of providers, there was a lot of variation across the state, Pitcher

said, adding that there are particular workforce challenges in poorer rural areas.

"There are a lot of counties that still need many resources. But to me, the most meaningful part of these results is that they show we have significant room to expand medication-assisted treatment within the state by having more nurse practitioners and [physician assistants](#) become providers for [medication](#) assisted treatment," Pitcher said.

Added Xu: "This finding speaks to the larger national shortages and maldistributions of health care providers available to treat opioid-dependent patients."

More information: Ariana Pitcher et al, The Supply of Authorized Providers for Medication-Assisted Treatment in Ohio, *Ohio Journal of Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.18061/ojph.v4i2.8439](https://doi.org/10.18061/ojph.v4i2.8439)

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