

What does it cost to be on a methadone or buprenorphine program?

- The patient needs to attend the pharmacy every day to take their medicine. A small charge (ie a professional service fee) is paid to the pharmacist.
- Once the patient is on a dose of medication that makes them feel okay they will need to go back to their doctor for new scripts about once a month.
- Some doctors bulk bill their patients and others may charge a fee over and above Medicare rebates.
- Many pharmacies offer discounts for payments made in advance.

How does someone start on a methadone or buprenorphine program?

- To enter into a treatment program patients either call the referral service DirectLine or visit their local doctor, who will either then prescribe the medication for them or refer them on to a doctor who will. This may be a general practitioner (GP) or a doctor in a specialist drug and alcohol clinic.

Can someone access treatment without other members of the community knowing he/she is on a program?

- All patients are entitled to confidential treatment and Victoria has strict privacy laws.
- It is important that the patient, doctor and pharmacist are able to communicate freely to ensure the best treatment is given.
- The amount of privacy that dispensing areas in pharmacies are able to offer varies so each patient should find a pharmacy that is suitable for his/her needs.

Where do I get information about treatment services, doctors and pharmacy programs in Victoria?

- DirectLine provides a 24-hour telephone counselling service and also refers patients to various treatment services, including withdrawal services and services for family members.
- Counsellors at DirectLine will find patients a doctor to treat them with methadone or buprenorphine and also a pharmacy to attend.
- Once a patient is ready for some counselling DirectLine can also refer them to a local service.
- **DirectLine can be contacted by phoning 1800 888 236.** An interpreter service is available for callers whose first language is not English.



Vietnamese

Pharmacotherapy Treatment with Methadone and Buprenorphine

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When Lo's parents found he was using heroin, they sent him back to his uncle in Saigon to dry out. He went away with one illness and came back with three.

Lo is still addicted to heroin but now he also has hepatitis C and HIV-AIDS.

In Vietnam there is plenty of heroin but few clean needles and no support network for people with an addiction problem.

If Lo's parents had known more about Victoria's Pharmacotherapy Program they may have decided that he was better off going into treatment closer to home.

What is methadone or buprenorphine treatment?

- Methadone and buprenorphine are the two most often prescribed medicines for people who have been addicted to heroin. They are taken as a substitute so the patient no longer feels the need to inject heroin.
- Heroin addiction is a long-term illness. It is often relapsing so patients need long-term treatment. Methadone and buprenorphine are suitable for maintenance programs.
- Treatment helps patients to bring order to their lives. It assists them to access education courses, hold down a job, and take better care of their children.

What are the benefits of methadone and buprenorphine treatment?

- Medical research shows that treatment is so effective that most patients in treatment either stop using heroin completely or at least drastically reduce their use. Patients are then able to make other lifestyle decisions and start to have a more normal life.
- Research has also shown that patients taking methadone or buprenorphine are less likely to:
 - o Die from a drug overdose,
 - o Catch hepatitis C or HIV-AIDS,
 - o Steal, commit crimes or turn to prostitution to support their drug habit.
- The best results are achieved when patients want to be in treatment and counselling is part of the program.

How does the methadone and buprenorphine program work?

- Patients need to have just the one doctor and one pharmacy for their methadone or buprenorphine treatment.
- Once a doctor to prescribe the methadone or buprenorphine has been found, this doctor will discuss with the patient their expectations of the program. The doctor needs to obtain a special permit before treating anyone with methadone or buprenorphine so sometimes the patient needs to wait a few hours between their first visit with the doctor and obtaining their prescription.
- The doctor will either find a pharmacy for the patient to go to everyday to collect their medication or else ask the patient to find a pharmacy. Patients can call DirectLine to help them with this.
- The doctor must sign a recent passport size photo of the patient so the pharmacist is sure whom the prescription is for. Patients must provide the photo.
- A prescription and the signed photo are then taken to the pharmacy, in a sealed envelope, and the pharmacist and patient agree on how they will work together.