

The Use of Antipsychotics in the Community in Newfoundland and Labrador

Choosing Wisely Canada Recommendations

1. Don't routinely use antipsychotics to treat primary insomnia in any age group.
2. Don't use antipsychotics as first choice to treat behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia.
3. Don't use atypical antipsychotics as a first-line intervention for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with disruptive behaviour disorders.

Practice Points

4. In people with dementia and behavioural symptoms, antipsychotics provide limited benefit and cause serious harm, including premature death.
5. Antipsychotics should be limited to cases where non-pharmacological measures have failed and patients pose an imminent threat to themselves or others.
6. Typical antipsychotics (or first-generation antipsychotics) are often used to treat delirium, major mental disorders and behavioural difficulties such as agitation. They work by blocking dopamine receptors in the brain. They can have significant side effects such as sedation, hypotension, involuntary movements, dry mouth, constipation and urinary retention.
7. Atypical antipsychotics (or second-generation antipsychotics) are more commonly used than typical antipsychotics due to having fewer side effects. They work by blocking both dopamine and serotonin receptors in the brain.

Data

Data on the use of antipsychotics in the community was obtained from the Pharmacy Network at Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) Health Services for three years: Apr 2020–Mar 2023.

Results

- In 2022/23 there was a total of 67,730 unique prescriptions for antipsychotics, a 6% increase compared to 2020/21.

- The number of individual patients prescribed antipsychotics in 2022/23 increased by 10% compared to 2020/21.

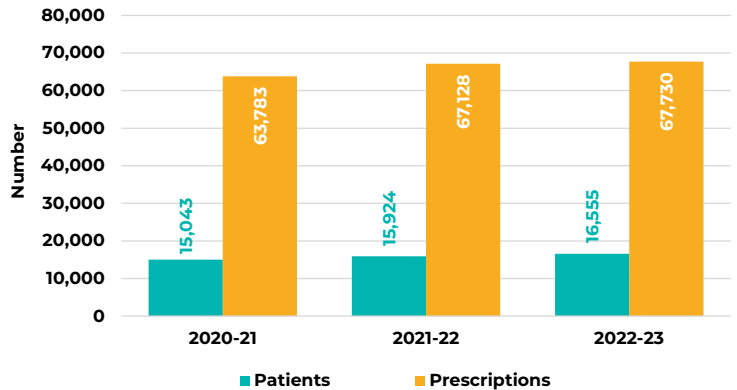


Figure 1. Number of Unique Antipsychotic Prescriptions and Patients, 2020–2023

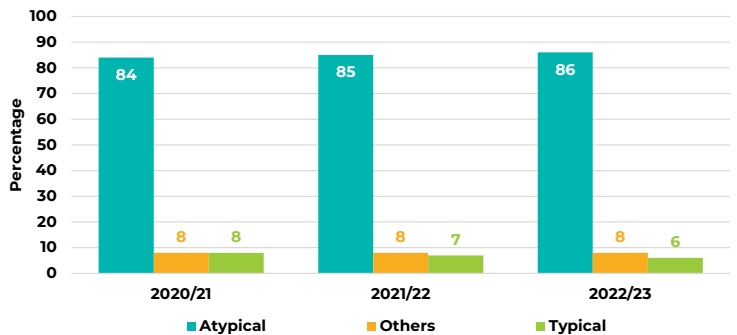


Figure 2. Percentage of Antipsychotic Prescriptions, 2020–2023

- Since 2020/21, the vast majority of prescriptions were for atypical antipsychotics.

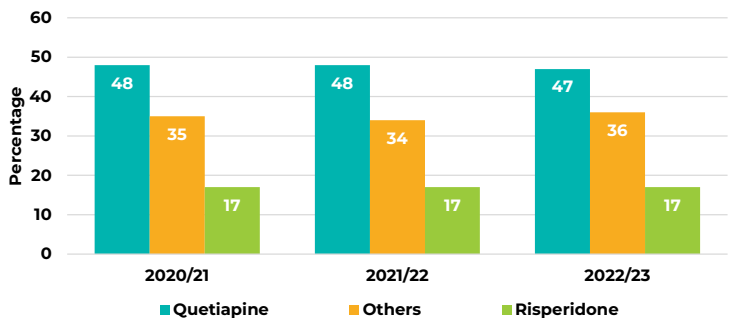
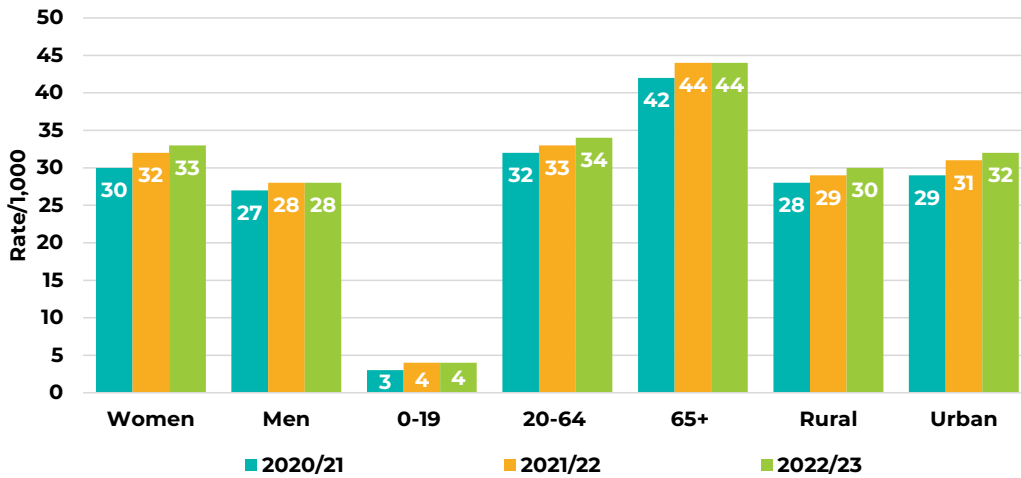


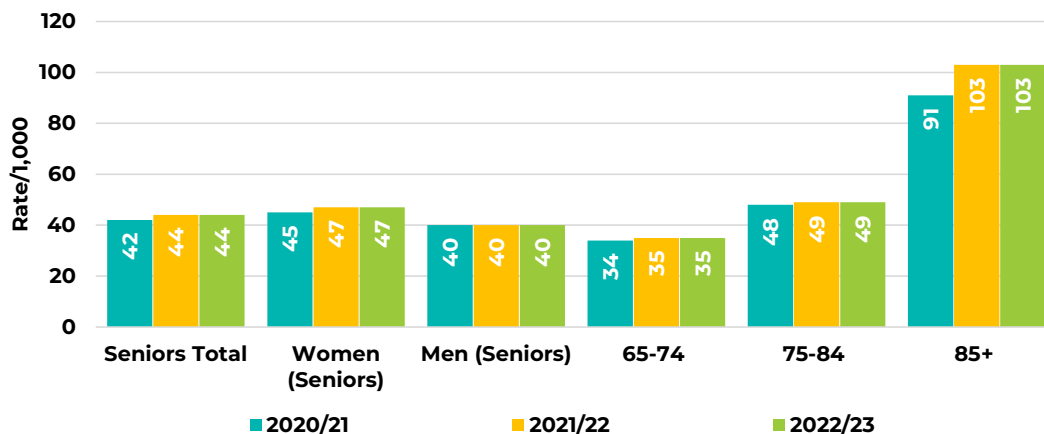
Figure 3. Percentage of Atypical Antipsychotic Prescriptions, 2020–2023

- The most frequently prescribed atypical was Quetiapine (47–48% of atypicals) and the second most frequent was Risperidone (17% of atypicals).



- Rates across all subgroups remained similar over the three-year period.
- The highest rate was seen amongst seniors with a rate of 44/1,000 people over the age of 65 receiving an antipsychotic in 2022/23.

Figure 4. Number of People Given an Antipsychotic per 1,000 People by Gender (Total Population), Age and Location, 2020–2023.



- In seniors, the rate of antipsychotics prescribed increased with age.

Figure 5. Rate of Seniors Given an Antipsychotic per 1,000 Seniors by Gender and Age, 2020–2023

Conclusions

1. From 2020–2023, the majority (85%) of prescriptions were for atypical agents with Quetiapine being the most frequently prescribed atypical.
2. There was a 10% increase in the number of unique patients prescribed an antipsychotic in 2022/23 when compared to 2020/21, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Apr 2020–Mar 2021), and therefore an increase in the number of prescriptions.
3. The use of antipsychotics for behavioural or psychological symptoms should be limited in seniors with dementia as the harms outweigh the benefits.