

# The Use of Benzodiazepines in the Community in Newfoundland and Labrador

## Choosing Wisely Canada Recommendations

1. Don't routinely continue benzodiazepines initiated during an acute care hospital admission without a careful review and plan of tapering and discontinuing, ideally prior to discharge.
2. Don't use benzodiazepines or other sedative-hypnotics in older adults as first choice for insomnia, agitation, or delirium.
3. Don't prescribe or dispense benzodiazepines without building a discontinuation strategy into the patient's treatment plan (except for patients who have a valid indication for long-term use).

## Practice Points

1. The risk of motor vehicle accidents, falls, and hip fractures can more than double in older adults taking benzodiazepines or other sedative-hypnotics.
2. Use of benzodiazepines should be reserved for alcohol withdrawal symptoms/delirium tremens or severe generalized anxiety disorder unresponsive to other therapies.

## Data

Data on the use of benzodiazepines 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 89,570 unique prescriptions for benzodiazepines, a 9% decrease when comparing to 2020/21.
- The number of unique patients stayed consistent over the three-year period.

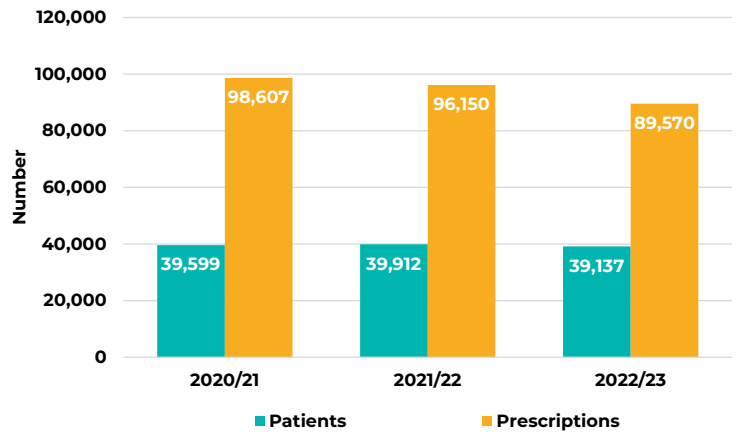


Figure 1. Number of Unique Benzodiazepines Patients and Prescriptions, 2020–2023

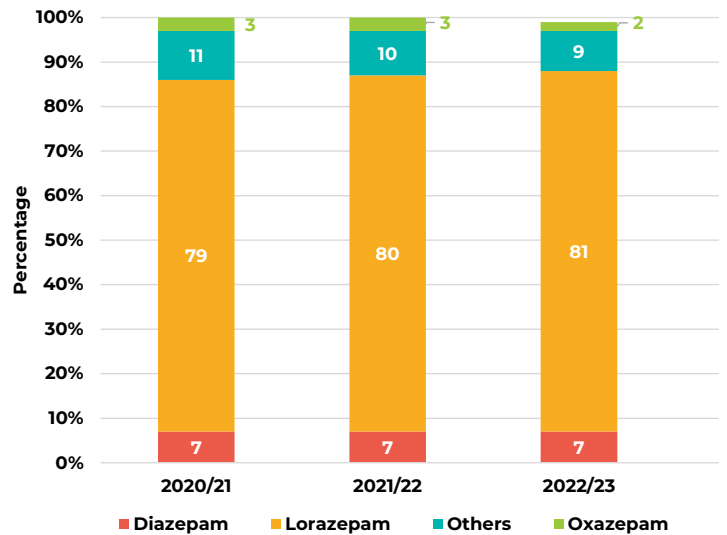
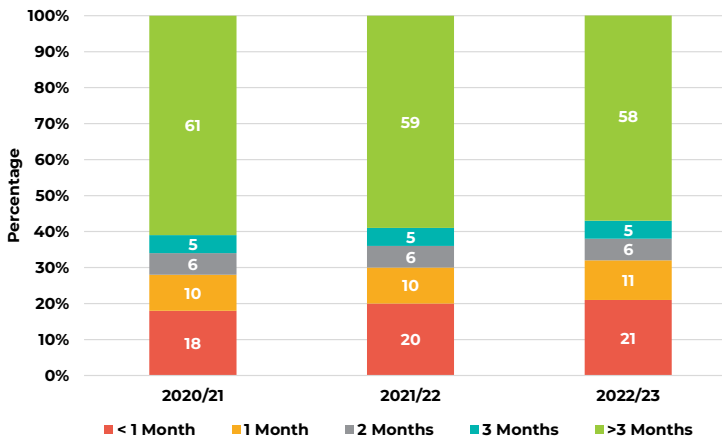


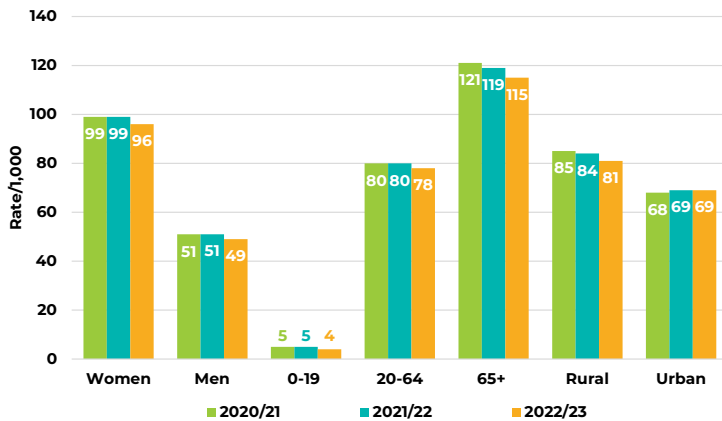
Figure 2. Distribution of Benzodiazepines Prescribed by Year, 2020–2023

- The most frequent benzodiazepine prescribed in the past three years was Lorazepam, which has a half-life of 10–20 hours.



**Figure 3. Duration of Unique Prescriptions for Benzodiazepines Provided to People During the Last Quarter of Each Fiscal Year**

- Over the three-year period, the majority of prescriptions for patients were for longer than three months.



**Figure 4. Rate of Benzodiazepines/1,000 People in Subgroups by Gender, Age and Location, 2020–2023**

- The rate of benzodiazepine use was almost twice as high in women compared to men over the three-year period.
- The rate of prescriptions increased by age.
- Rural areas of NL had higher rates of benzodiazepine use compared to urban areas.

## Conclusions

- Lorazepam was the most frequently prescribed benzodiazepine.
- Although the number of unique patients stayed consistent from 2020/21 to 2022/23, the number of unique prescriptions decreased by 9% since the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020–March 2021).
- In view of the fact that the benefits:harms ratio in seniors is adverse, tapering and discontinuation of long-term benzodiazepine use is recommended together with decreased initiation of benzodiazepines for insomnia, agitation and delirium.