# Controlled Medicines Prescribing Regulations FAQs

## How do the controlled medicines regulations affect prescription and supply of controlled medicines in the ACT?

Prescribers may seek approval:

- to prescribe by category for a class of drug enabling titration of dose and switching between agents in that class; or
- for a specific drug, form and strength; and
- for up to three years in some categories.

## What are the categories that a prescriber can apply for?

**Category 1** – Controlled medicine to treat a person with chronic (non-cancer) pain.

**Category 2** – Controlled medicine to treat a person with pain directly attributed to:

active malignancy or life limiting disease state; or

on a case-by-case basis; and

where the prognosis might reasonably be expected to be 12 months or less.

**Category 3** – Controlled medicine to treat a person with drug-dependency.

**Category 4** – Controlled medicine to treat a person with a licensed indication or severe insomnia.

**Category 5** – Controlled medicine to treat a person with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

**Category 6** – Cannabis products for medicinal purposes (as controlled medicines) to treat a person with indications directly attributable to:

spasticity in multiple sclerosis;

nausea and vomiting related to cancer chemotherapy;

pain and/or anxiety in patients with active malignancy or a life limiting disease state where the prognosis might reasonably be expected to be 12 months or less; and/or

Refractory paediatric epilepsy.

More detailed information about the categories can be found in the *ACT Controlled Medicines Prescribing Standards* on the ACT Health website http://www.health.act.gov.au/pharmaceuticalservices. For medicinal cannabis, see http://www.health.act.gov.au/medicinal-cannabis.

## Can I apply for approval under multiple categories for one patient?

Yes, provided the proposed treatment/medicine is consistent with the recognised therapeutic standard of what is appropriate in the circumstances. For example, a prescriber may hold a **Category 5** approval to treat someone with ADHD and a **Category 1** approval to manage the same patient's chronic back pain. Category restrictions will continue to be applicable including the requirement to provide documented support from an appropriate specialist should the threshold dosages of that category be exceeded.

## Do I have to apply for approval under a category?

No, prescribers have the option to apply for approval for each drug, form and strength. It is simply a matter of completing the Approval to Prescribe by Drug section on the Application for Approval to Prescribe Controlled Medicines Application Form.

## How do I know if I have standing short term approval?

All prescribers of controlled medicines automatically have standing approval to prescribe a controlled medicine without having to seek approval from the Chief Health Officer for

- Hospital inpatients, and
- For short term treatment for up to two months, provided the patient is not drug-dependant (in relation to a controlled medicine or prohibited substance), and the patient has not had a controlled medicine prescribed within the preceding two months.

Some prescribers working at a hospital or certain institutions also have standing interim approval to prescribe buprenorphine and methadone to patients for up to 72 hours.

## Do I need to apply for approval for take-away dosing for patients under Category 3?

Controlled medicine approval applications are considered in accordance with the Controlled Medicines Prescribing Standards, .

A Category 3 approval authorises the supply of take- away (unsupervised) doses of opioid maintenance treatment up to a certain limit depending on the length of time a person has

been in treatment and whether they are taking methadone or buprenorphine/ naloxone. Some special case provisions are also included under Category 3.

Prescribers must prescribe take away doses in accordance with the Controlled Medicine Prescribing Standards, the National Guidelines for Medication Assisted Treatment of Opioid Dependence (2014) and the Opioid Maintenance Treatment in the ACT: Local Policies and Procedures.

Prescribers must apply to the Chief Health Officer for an Approval by Drug to prescribe additional take-away doses, or to commence dosing earlier than permitted under a Category 3 approval, or to prescribe take-away doses for single agent buprenorphine (Subutex®).

## Do I need to write the Approval number on the script?

No, there is no requirement for prescribers to annotate the prescription with a CHO approval number. Pharmacists are able to dispense the script without having to check whether an approval is in place for a person.

## How is drug seeking behaviour and inappropriate supply of controlled medicines monitored?

The Health Protection Service (HPS) uses the Drugs and Poisons Information System (DAPIS)database to collect information about the supply of controlled medicines dispensed from ACT pharmacies. DAPIS provides alerts to the HPS about unauthorised prescribing and potential public health issues such as doctor shopping. The HPS monitors these alerts and may contact prescribers or pharmacists if concerned about the supply of a controlled medicine(s) to a patient.

## Where can I find more information?

For further information, please see the *ACT Controlled Medicine Prescribing Standards*, visit http://www.health.act.gov.au/pharmaceuticalservices or contact the Pharmaceutical Services Section of the Health Protection Service on hps@act.gov.au or (02) 6205 0998.

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