EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF LONG ACTING INJECTABLE BUPRENORPHINE PROVISION ACROSS SCOTLAND

SCOTTISH DRUGS FORUM

BACKGROUND

As Scotland continues to implement the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards, use of long-acting injectable buprenorphine (LAIB) has grown, with 23% of people in MAT prescribed it in 2024. Despite this, limited evidence exists on how LAIB is experienced by service users and frontline staff. This evaluation explored lived experiences of receiving and providing LAIB, to better understand what supports and hinders the provision and impacts of LAIB.

AUTHORS

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METHODS AND SAMPLE

A mixed methods and peer research approach was applied with a total of 108 participants across four health boards.

PEOPLE IN LAIB TREATMENT N=55

46 interviews with people in the community

9 prison residents participated in focus groups

52% MALE (n=24)

48% FEMALE (n=22)

53 staff in drug support services completed an online survey

	NHS	THIRD SECTOR	
Dumfries & Galloway	13	2	15
Forth Valley	3	6	9
Highland	13	3	16
Lothian	10	3	13

RESULTS

Access & Information:
- Over half (53%) requested LAIB and (59%) started in first week
- Over a third (39%) of participants wanted better information (e.g. around side effects and what to expect from treatment)
- Peer education was often the preferred format for information over written materials

Choice:
- Most participants had choice around dose, but fewer choices about delivery (e.g. location, provider)
- Limited choice was reported in custodial settings
- Stigma associated with pharmacy attendance influenced treatment preferences and was a motivating factor for starting LAIB

Substance Use & Harm Reduction:
- 47% reported ongoing use of other substances on top of LAIB
- Tailored harm reduction support was needed, which was responsive to risks around poly-substance use and addressed the reasons why people use substances

Support:
- Positive experiences were linked to continuity of care, patient-led levels of contact and trusted relationships
- There were significant gaps in access to mental health and psychosocial support
- The transition to greater “mental clarity” for some could be challenging without adequate support

Impact of LAIB:
- LAIB provided increased autonomy and stability
- LAIB could reduce stigma (e.g. due to less pharmacy contact, it was less stigmatised than methadone)
- Improved relationships and life focus (e.g. get back to work, go away on holiday)
- 65% of participants rated LAIB treatment and support as good or very good and participants stated they would recommend LAIB to others, regardless of their own experience

“I feel like I'm back to my normal self. I do have a cry. I do feel a stress. I do feel love, but I feel everything now that I couldn't feel before."
- a person accessing LAIB

Read the full report

CONCLUSION

LAIB is a valuable treatment for many, associated with greater autonomy, stability, and quality of life. LAIB’s effectiveness depends on how it is delivered and supported including ensuring there is equitable access, informed choice, and robust wraparound support, particularly in mental health and harm reduction.

Conflict of Interest: Camarus & Ethypharm, through an education grant, fund the Buzz magazine at SDF and have no input into any other projects

Funding: Thanks to the Scottish Government for the funding of this work.