

# A tool to reverse overdose



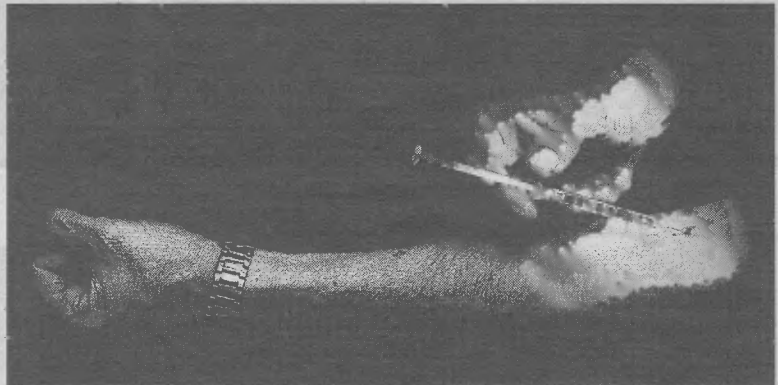
## Q What is naloxone and what does it do?

Naloxone is a pharmaceutical product with various trade names including Narcan. In Australia, as elsewhere, naloxone is widely used in hospital emergency departments and ambulance services to reverse the effects of overdoses from heroin, oxycodone and other opioids. It blocks the action of opioids on receptors in the brain. Naloxone is available in Australia, but only on prescription.

Naloxone reverses the effects of opioid intoxication. It does not produce any intoxication and has no effect on people who do not have opioids in their system.

Scientific evidence confirms that, when given appropriate training, people who use opioids, their peers, family members and other potential overdose witnesses, are able to effectively manage an overdose situation including the administration of naloxone with an intramuscular injection using a pre-filled syringe called a Minijet.

Australia's first community-based program started in the ACT in 2012, led by the peer-based group the Canberra Alliance for Harm Reduction and



Naloxone is being evaluated as a way of reversing the effects of opioid intoxication.

Advocacy, as a two-year project. The evaluation report will be released later this year.

This account from one of the program participants illustrates the intervention and some of its outcomes:

"When she dropped (overdosed) it wasn't like a real drop to the ground. She just sort of slid into a sleep. I was amazed that what I learnt from CAHMA kicked in. First I gripped her ear and when she still didn't come around I knew that I needed to do something. I didn't put her in a shower like I might have before but followed the process I was taught. I checked her breathing and her heart. I couldn't believe it later but I took control and breathed for her and then went for the naloxone in our bedroom. I even called the ambo! Giving her the naloxone was easy because it was already in a Minijet. I even knew that if I gave it to her properly she would wake up gently. I was amazed to

realise I now know how to save a life!"

Community-based naloxone programs are now operating in the ACT, NSW, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

Although naloxone has the capacity to significantly improve the management of an opioid overdose, overdose witnesses should assess the person, call an ambulance, remove any airway blockages, provide rescue breathing while awaiting the naloxone to take effect, place the affected person in the recovery position, and evaluate and provide support to the person after the naloxone takes effect.

**Response by:** ANU Visiting Fellow David McDonald and Canberra Alliance for Harm Reduction and Advocacy manager Sione Crawford.

**Next week:** Double glazing.

■ Brought to you by the Fuzzy Logic Science Show, 11.30am, Sundays, on 2XX 98.3FM. Send your questions to AskFuzzy@Zoho.com