

Chief Executive
2 Franklin Street
BELFAST
BT2 8DQ

Tel: 028 9536 3863
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4th August 2023

BY EMAIL

Our Ref: FOI 1997

Dear [REDACTED]

Your request for information was received on 3rd July 2023 and was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please be advised that the Business Services Organisation (BSO) has now completed its search for the information you requested in relation to antidepressants prescribed to children aged 0 to 15 across Northern Ireland between 2012 and 2022.

Please find this information enclosed.

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter, as the BSO, along with all other public authorities are not obliged to accept internal review requests after this period has lapsed.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to

Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ

If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision-making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the BSO has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.



You can contact Information Commissioner at:

Website: www.ico.org.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Email: casework@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office
3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However, the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Bailey".

Karen Bailey
Chief Executive

Enc

Freedom of Information Request (BSO 1997)

1. Number of antidepressant¹ prescription items² dispensed to persons aged under 18 years old by year.

The figures requested are contained in the table below. This data may have been affected by improvements in prescription scan rates since 2018. For an explanation, see the general notes at the end of this response.

Year	Under 12 Years	12 to 17 Years	Total
2014	407	11,157	11,564
2015	347	12,442	12,789
2016	291	13,251	13,542
2017	435	13,232	13,667
2018	591	13,653	14,244
2019	815	17,555	18,370
2020	850	18,729	19,579
2021	583	18,465	19,048
2022	542	18,526	19,068

¹ Anti-depressant items are defined as those categorised under British National Formulary (BNF) chapter 4, section 3 utilised by the BSO Family Practitioner Services Payment System.

² The number of prescription items dispensed refers to prescriptions issued in primary care, subsequently dispensed (by a community pharmacist, appliance supplier or dispensing doctor) and submitted to the Business Services Organisation (BSO) for payment. It does not include items on prescriptions which have been issued to patients but haven't been dispensed.

2. Number of persons aged under 18 years old who have been dispensed antidepressants by year and sex.

The figures requested are contained in the table below. This data may have been affected by improvements in prescription scan rates since 2018. For an explanation, see the general notes at the end of this response.

Year	Male	Female	Total
2014	896	1,556	2,452
2015	962	1,654	2,616
2016	964	1,735	2,699
2017	1,006	1,685	2,691
2018	1,106	1,683	2,789
2019	1,213	1,857	3,070
2020	1,115	1,835	2,950
2021	1,050	1,866	2,916
2022	1,006	1,835	2,841

3. Number of antidepressant prescription items dispensed to persons aged under 18 years old by year and Local Government District.

The figures requested are contained in the table below. Items have been allocated to Local Government District based on patient postcode information contained on the associated prescriptions. This data may have been affected by improvements in prescription scan rates since 2018. For an explanation, see the general notes at the end of this response.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Antrim & Newtownabbey	673	816	1,064	1,061	903	1,054	1,162	1,229	1,144
Ards & North Down	1,152	1,295	1,448	1,467	1,426	1,733	1,935	2,010	1,998
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	1,013	1,170	1,144	1,202	1,511	2,152	2,148	2,043	2,356
Belfast	3,427	3,409	3,568	3,265	3,263	4,359	4,717	4,661	4,482
Causeway Coast & Glens	727	729	771	860	757	1,093	1,020	986	1,031
Derry City & Strabane	745	800	793	932	1,037	1,240	1,316	1,174	1,049
Fermanagh & Omagh	397	374	331	491	570	905	859	720	575
Lisburn & Castlereagh	989	1,159	1,302	1,106	1,108	1,635	1,809	1,708	1,873
Mid & East Antrim	671	899	1,015	963	896	958	1,180	1,122	1,302
Mid Ulster	769	978	1,063	1,111	1,312	1,537	1,574	1,492	1,493
Newry, Mourne & Down	897	1,076	953	1,073	1,269	1,557	1,795	1,864	1,729
Unknown ³	104	84	90	136	192	147	64	39	36
Total	11,564	12,789	13,542	13,667	14,244	18,370	19,579	19,048	19,068

³ These items were dispensed from prescriptions where valid postcode information could not be retrieved.

4. Percentage change in antidepressant prescription items dispensed to persons aged under 18 years between 2014 and 2022.

The figures requested are contained in the table below. This data may have been affected by improvements in prescription scan rates since 2018. For an explanation, see the general notes at the end of this response.

	2014	2022	% Change
No of items	11,564	19,068	64.9

5. Percentage change in number of persons aged (i) under 12 years old and (ii) between 12 to 17 years who have been dispensed antidepressants between 2014 and 2022.

The figures requested are contained in the table below. For the purposes of this table, each individual has been categorised based on their minimum age during the relevant year.

Age Group	2014	2022	% Change
Under 12 Years	151	132	-12.6
12 to 17 Years	2,301	2,709	17.7
Total	2,452	2,841	15.9

General notes

- BSO dispensing data does not record the condition for which a drug has been prescribed. Therefore not all antidepressant items may have been prescribed to treat a depressive illness.
- There are differences in prescription dispensing and processing in Northern Ireland compared with other parts of the UK. This should be noted if these statistics are used in comparisons with equivalent data from other UK regions. For example, there is no outpatient dispensing in Northern Ireland.
- The information contained in this response is derived from matching patient attributes, such as age, sex and geographical location, to prescription records. This process relies on data captured during the scanning of paper prescriptions submitted for payment by pharmacists to BSO.

Due to the limitations of this process, patient data is not retrieved for a percentage of prescriptions dispensed.

Patient data was available for around 80% to 90% of items between 2013/14 and 2016/17, before decreasing to lows of around 75% in 2017/18 and 2018/19. Since 2019/20, this scan rate increased to around 90% of items dispensed.

This means that all figures provided should be treated as estimates and that variations in scanning performance might contribute to changes in dispensing trends over time, especially when smaller numbers of prescriptions are involved. This limitation will particularly impact any analysis involving item counts as not all items, with their associated patient characteristics, will have been captured in any given year.

Although patient numbers are also based on prescription scans, the accuracy of the data is greater as it relates to all those patients who had a least one prescription dispensed over the course of the year. As many patients will have had multiple prescriptions dispensed over the course of a year for this type of medication, it raises the probability that they will be captured on at least one occasion over the year through a successful scan.