

**Opioid Agonist Therapy (OAT): A Systematic Review of Older Adult Experience**

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**Dr. Lara Nixon**  
**Dr. K. Alix Hayden**

No conflicts of interest to declare



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O'Brien Centre for the **BHS**  
BACHELOR OF HEALTH SCIENCES PROGRAM

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**Overview**

- Systematic Review (**Framework Synthesis**)
- Elevating **older adult experiences** during opioid agonist therapy (OAT)
- **Preliminary Findings**
  - organized around Age-Friendly framework
- Recommendations for change
  - OAT as an enabling place

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Rationale

 **Older adult substance use: on the rise** More entering OAT

 **Older adults: unique health needs** Neglected in research, service delivery, and policy

Ardt, 2011  
McDonald, 2010

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Objective

Understand older adult experiences during OAT with **aim to inform policy/program changes, improve service delivery**

How?  
We **synthesized the patient experience literature on older adults receiving OAT** and applied an Age-Friendly framework

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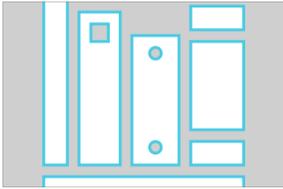
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Methods

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**Search Parameters**

-  Opioid Agonist Therapy MMT, OAT, OST...
-  Older Adult (50+) elder\*, senior\*, old\*...
-  Patient Experience lived experience\*, perspective\*...

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**Review Type**

• WHO Age-Friendly Cities framework



WHO, 2007  
Carroll, 2013

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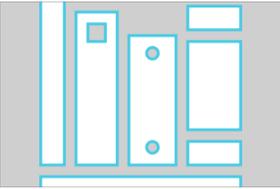
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**Preliminary Findings**

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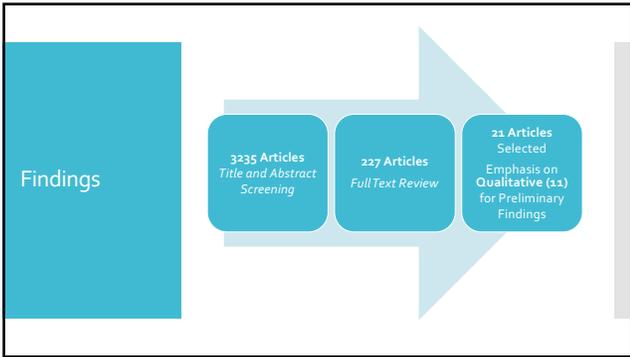
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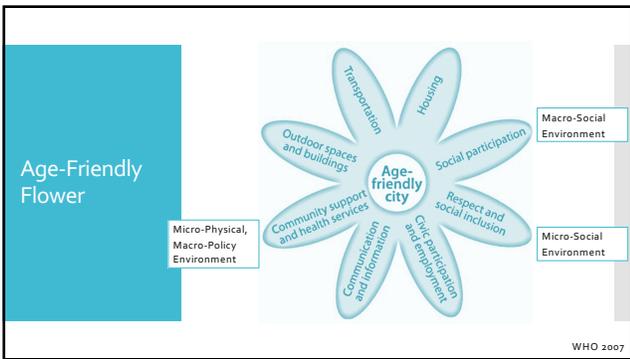
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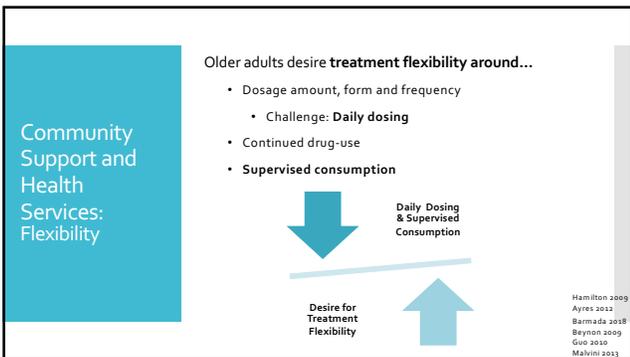
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**Community Support and Health Services: Flexibility**

"I would like to be allowed to pick up my script once a week rather than every day; it's embarrassing to be identified as a druggie."

"[supervised consumption] makes me feel like a two year old child, it's humiliating..."

"I like it [using drugs]; I'm not doing anyone any harm apart from myself... I've kept it together for 20 years, I don't affect anyone."

One participant was distressed that his doctor would not increase his prescription of methadone ampoules, only his "linctus", which made him vomit

- A result of macro-level policy

Ayres 2012  
Benyon 2009

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**Community Support and Health Services: Stability**

**OAT enables stability in the lives of older adults**

"You get a chance to stand still instead of moving all the time"

"[because of OAT, I] have my family back and money in my pocket that does not go to drugs"

"caught up in a fog, a fog of addiction for nearly 30 years. I was like a racehorse with blinders on... Now I have a chance. The fog is gone."

Malvini 2013  
Rosen 2011  
Hamilton 2009

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**Social Participation: Macro-Social Stigma**

Drug User + Old Age + On OAT → Combined Stigma Experience

"My family treats me like I am still on street drugs. If my family sees me using methadone, they treat me like I am no good... They also saw methadone as being something that is short term and don't understand that without methadone I could return to my drug of choice."

Conner 2018,  
Hightower, 2017

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**Social Participation: Isolation**

- Older adults experience **Isolation**
  - Avoiding and mistrusting others
  - Including treatment counselors
  - Loss of social networks

*"It's hard for me to confide in people because I tried so much before and that's why it's hard. Betrayal."*

*"I just don't want nobody around me. And in a way that's good and in a way it's not..."*

*"Friends, meaning my good true friends, they're gone. They died, they've passed over the years. And, I'm pretty funny about taking on new friends. I'm very weary to, 'cause I think I'm gonna lose them again."*

Conner, 2008  
Benyon, 2009  
Smith, 2009  
Hamilton, 2009

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**Respect and Social Inclusion: Micro-OAT environment**

- Macro-level **Stigmas** contribute to **negative micro-level Interactions** at OAT Clinics
  - Not getting along with staff/counselors
  - Lack of empathy, relatability
  - **Distrust**

Ayres 2012  
Conner 2008  
Conner 2010  
Smith 2009  
Barmada 2018

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**Contrasting experiences with OAT Staff**

Listening vs Distrust

Flexibility vs Policing/Control

Empathy vs Stigma/Disrespect

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**Respect and Social Inclusion**

*"I had to wait while people behind me were served, they knew what I was there for."*

*"You kinda felt almost like a herded-in cow or something ... and we ain't in a barnyard. They made everyone feel so yucky about themselves... They were very, very untrusting. And even if you didn't do anything, they would look at you like you did."*

*"Always trying to catch me doing something. You know what I mean. They're always trying to catch me in the wrong. How can you talk to somebody like that or tell him something personal or not walk sideways when you walk out of his office?"*

Ayres 2012  
Conner 2008  
Smith 2009

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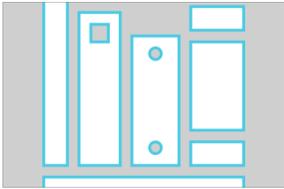
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**Conclusions**

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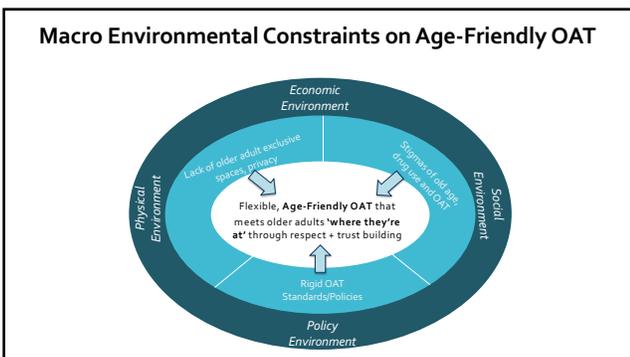
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Preliminary Recommendations

- **Emphasize on-site social support**
  - Older adult support groups, community building
- **OAT as an enabling, interactive place**
  - Everyday encounters as an opportunity

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Neale, 2018:  
OAT as opportunity

*"Going to the chemist on a daily basis **actually gets me outside the house**. Because I don't go outside, I really don't do anything. I'm clinically depressed... That would be it, 24 h a day inside. I **wouldn't be going out and talking to anyone**"*

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Preliminary Recommendations

- **Emphasize on-site social support**
  - Older adult support groups, community building
- **OAT as an enabling, interactive place**
  - Everyday encounters as an opportunity
- **Staff Training**
  - Emphasize respect, counter stigma
  - Specific education around Age-Friendly care
- **Program Flexibility** via policy shifts
  - Desire to detox, continue using
  - Dosage type, amount, frequency

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**Conclusion and Summary**

Older Adults in OAT experience...

- Community Support and Health Services: Lack of Flexibility
- Social Participation: Isolation, Stigma
- Respect and Social Inclusion: Mistrust, Disrespect

We need to:

- **shift OAT to create environments that...**
  - address the risks older adults experience
  - emphasize that treating older adults in stigmatizing ways is a negative for their care/limits relationship building

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**Thank you for your time and participation!**

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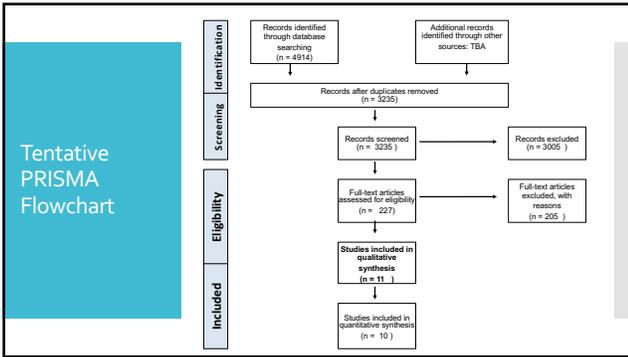
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Transportation

- Relying on Public Transit
  - Long transit times
  - Safety concerns
  - Physical Limitations
- Makes Frequent Dosing Challenging
  - Inconvenient to attend on site

Barmada 2018  
Rosen, 2011  
Beynon, 2009

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Communication and Information

It was suggested that **information for older users should be readily available:**

- More information aimed specifically at older users

[older adult participants wanted to] develop an **information leaflet aimed at older people** including a clear message that **older people do use drugs and are welcome at drugs services.** This would include information about detoxification and support services locally, and information about the provision of substitute prescriptions for older people...

Ayres 2012

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Civic Participation and Employment

- **Daily OAT dosing limits employment options**
  - Long acting (non-daily) OAT was mentioned as a way to enable secure employment opportunities
- **OAT allows financial participation in society**
  - Purchasing desired items/paying rent, rather than opiates
  - Reduces need to resort to illegal activities for survival

*"I would like to work first shift or get promoted, but I can't because the times I would have to work would interfere with me getting my meds."* (Hightower, 2017)

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