

# National Pharmacist Survey on the Exemptions under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)

---

## Survey Results



# Introduction

---

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacists have helped provide continuity of care for vulnerable patients prescribed opioid therapy or other controlled substances. This was possible because of temporary exemptions to the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA)* along with Health Canada guidance clarifying that under the CDSA and its regulations, pharmacists may adapt opioids and controlled drugs and substances.

In October 2021, CPhA conducted a national survey of pharmacists to understand the impact of the exemptions on pharmacy practice and patient care. The results will help to inform our continued advocacy efforts for permanent changes to the CDSA that would enable pharmacists to manage opioid therapy and controlled substances.

# Methodology

---

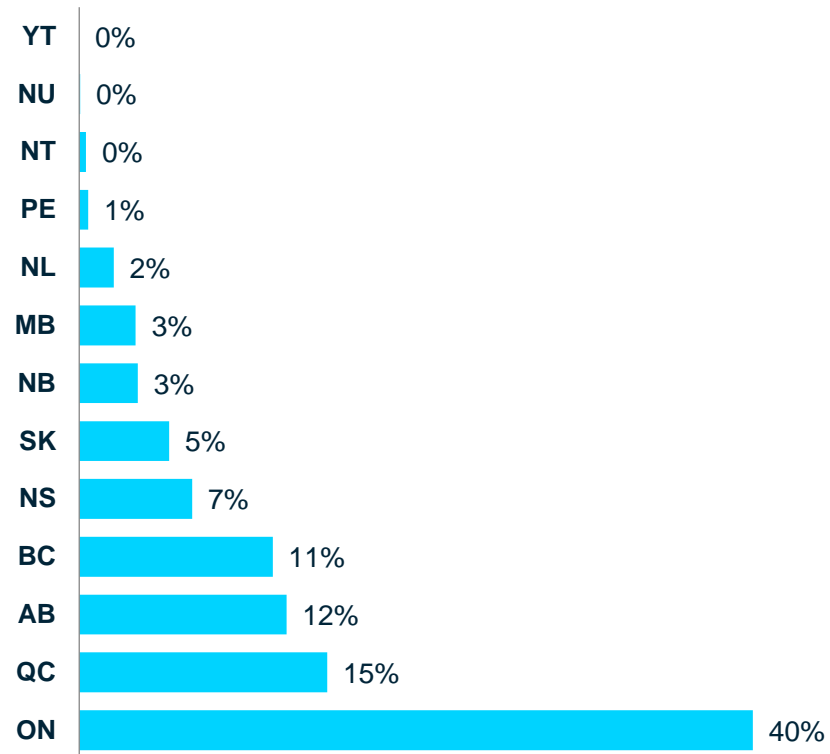
- Practising Canadian community pharmacists were invited to participate in the National Pharmacist Survey on the Exemptions under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) through the CPhA Insights newsletter, an email to the CPhA database, social media and partner communications.
- The bilingual survey was conducted online using Survey Monkey software.
- Responses were collected between October 7 and 19, 2021
- A total of 1,467 complete responses were received.

# Respondent Profile



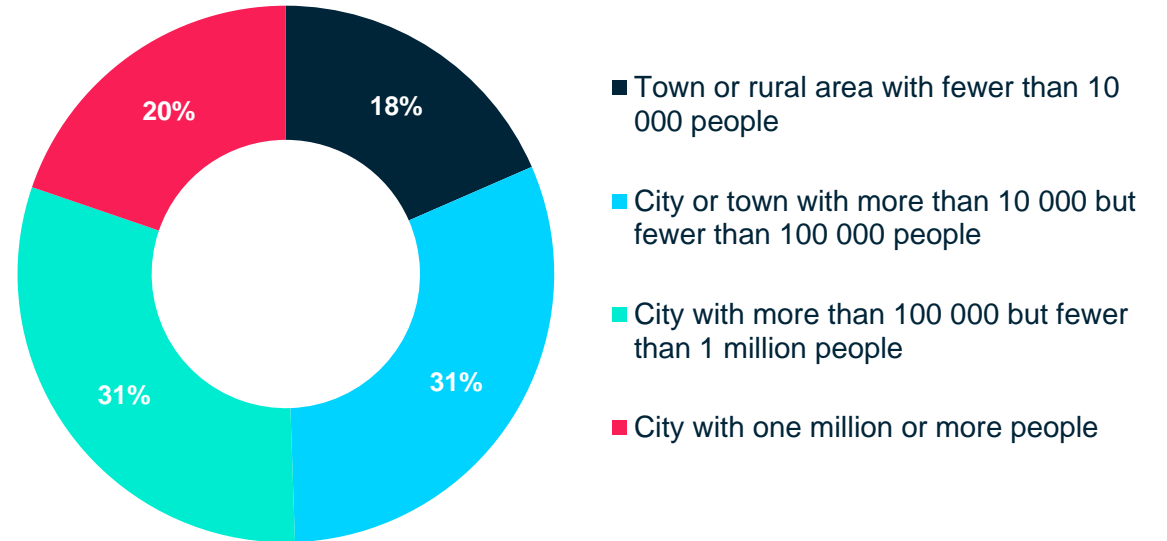
# Respondent Profile

## Location of pharmacy practice



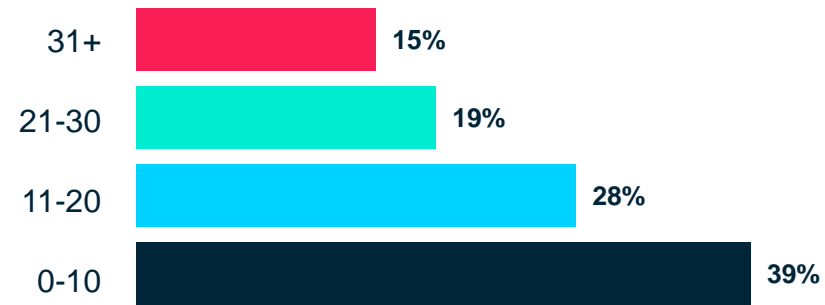
## Type of community |

Which of the below best describes the type of community in which you work?

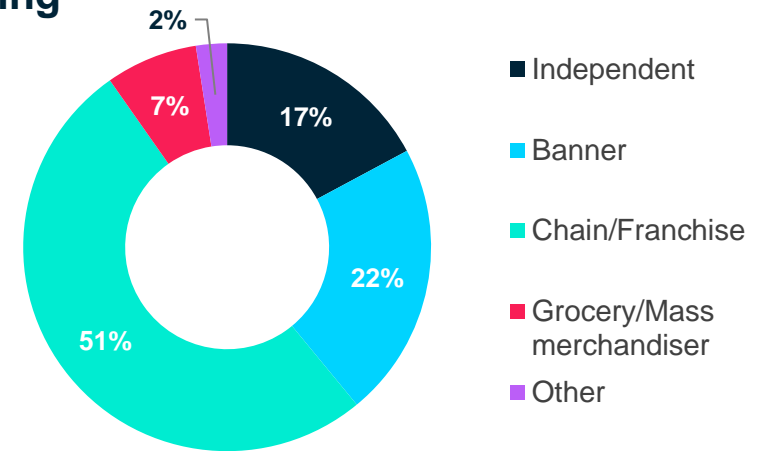


# Respondent Profile

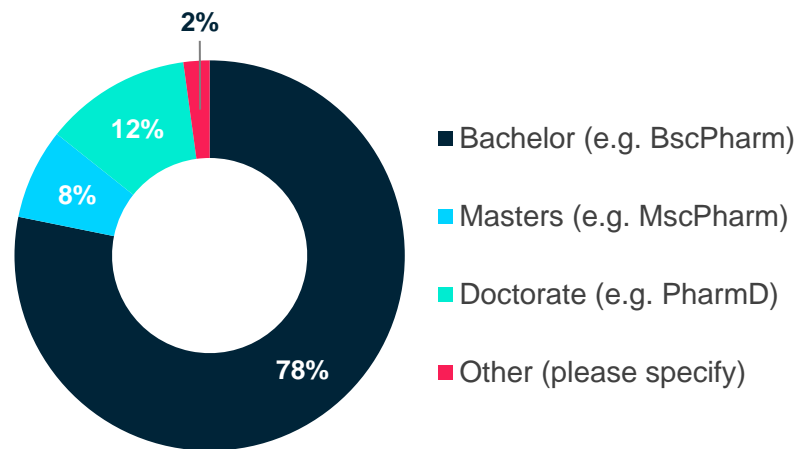
**Years in practice** | How many years have you been a practising pharmacist?



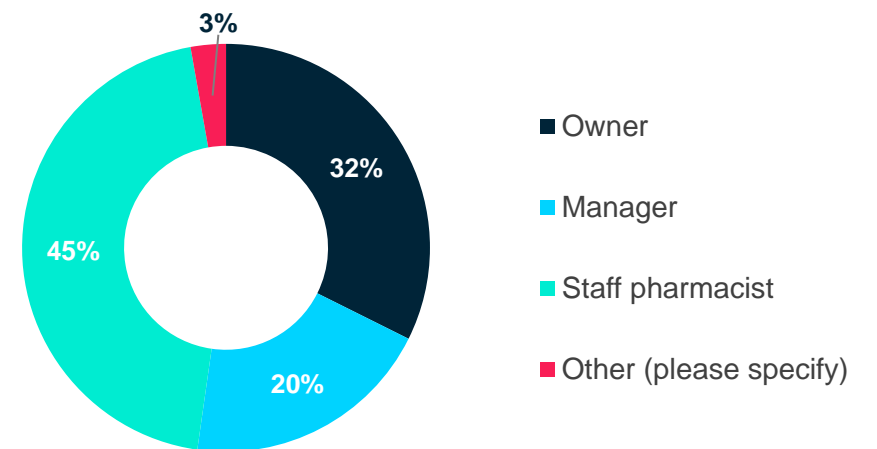
**Main practice setting**



**Degree attainment** | (Select all that apply)



**Current position**



# Implementing the CDSA exemptions in practice

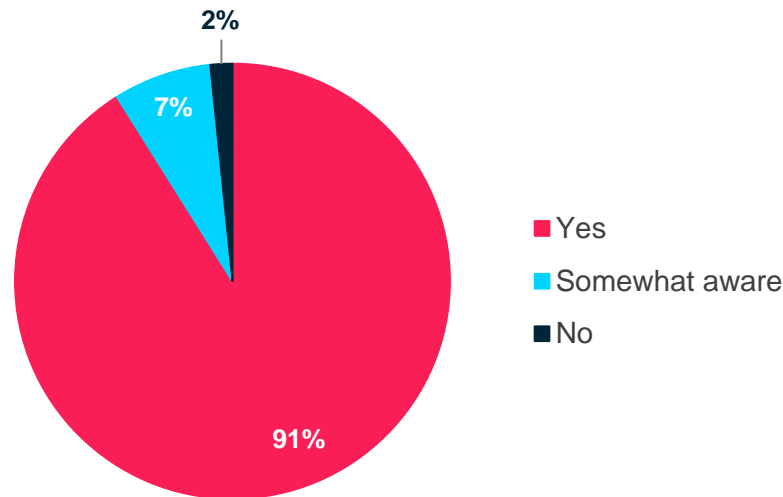


# Awareness of CDSA exemptions & Health Canada guidance on adapting controlled drugs and substances

Among survey respondents, there is a **high level of awareness of CDSA exemptions** but less awareness of Health Canada guidance permitting pharmacists to adapt opioids and controlled substances.

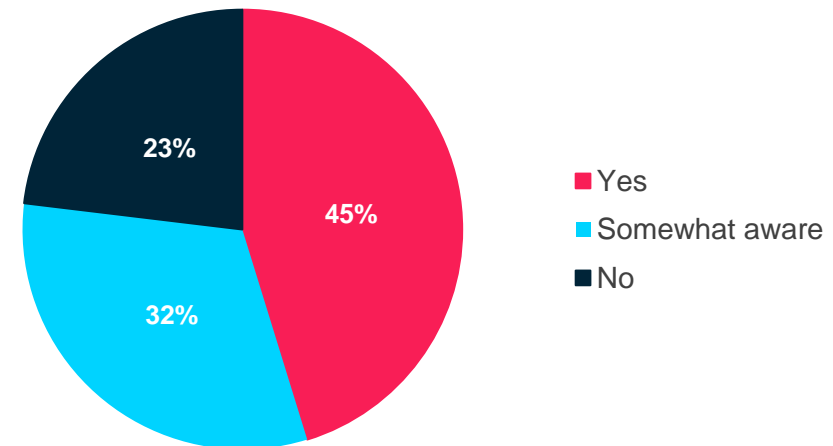
## Awareness of CDSA exemptions

Are you aware of the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) Sec. 56* Exemptions that allow you to extend, renew and transfer prescriptions for opioids and controlled substances?



## Awareness of Health Canada's guidance about the CDSA and adapting controlled drugs and substances

Are you aware of Health Canada's interpretive guide, clarifying its position that under the CDSA and its regulations pharmacists should be permitted to adjust the formulation, dose and regimen, de-prescribe and part-fill prescriptions for opioids and controlled drugs and substances?



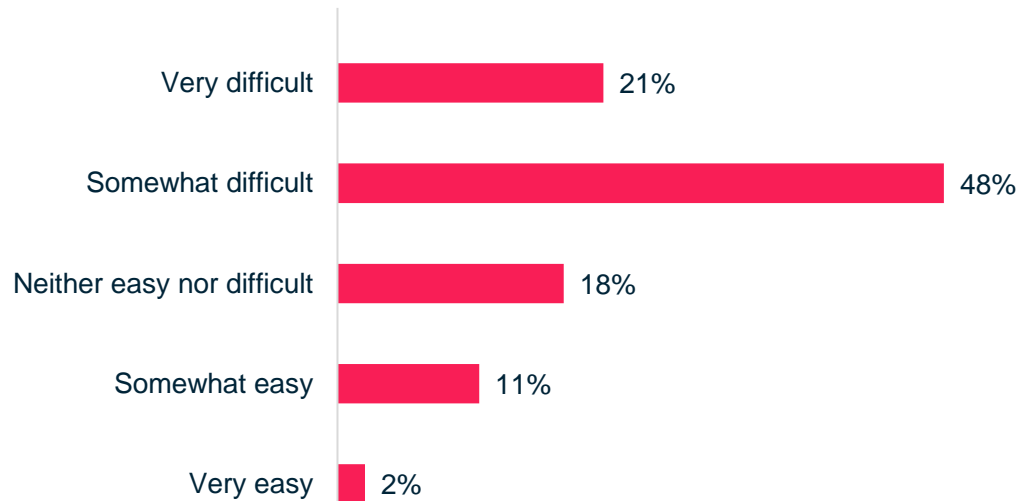


# Prescriber availability during the COVID-19 pandemic

*Over the past year, most pharmacists found it difficult to reach prescribers and regularly encountered patients requiring a change/refill for an opioid or controlled substance when their physician was unavailable.*

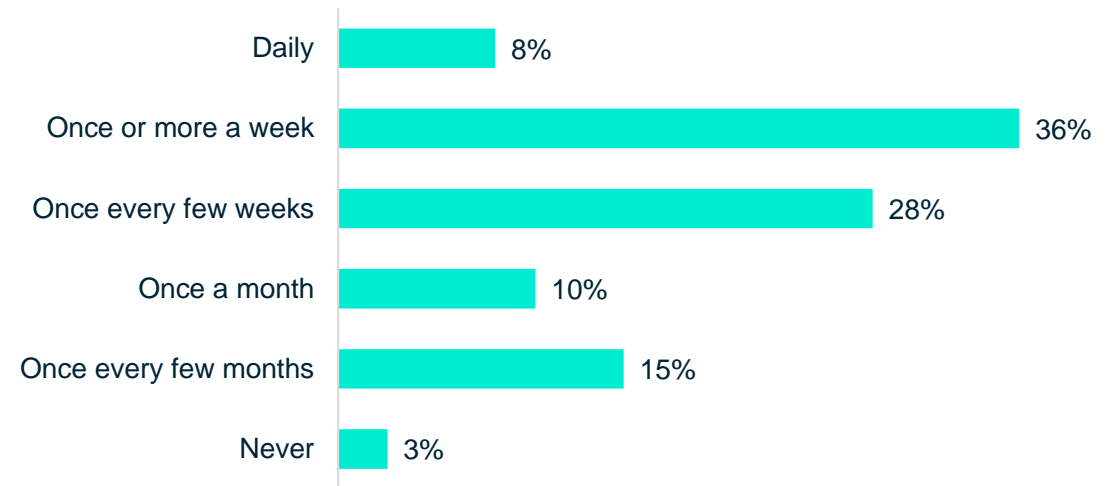
## Reaching prescribers

In the past year, how easy/difficult has it been to reach prescribers in a timely manner to extend, renew, transfer or adapt prescriptions for patients taking opioids or controlled substances?



## Encountering patients requiring a change or refill when their physician was unavailable

In the past year, how frequently have you encountered a patient who required a change or a refill for their opioid prescription or controlled substance when their physician was unavailable or their clinic was closed?

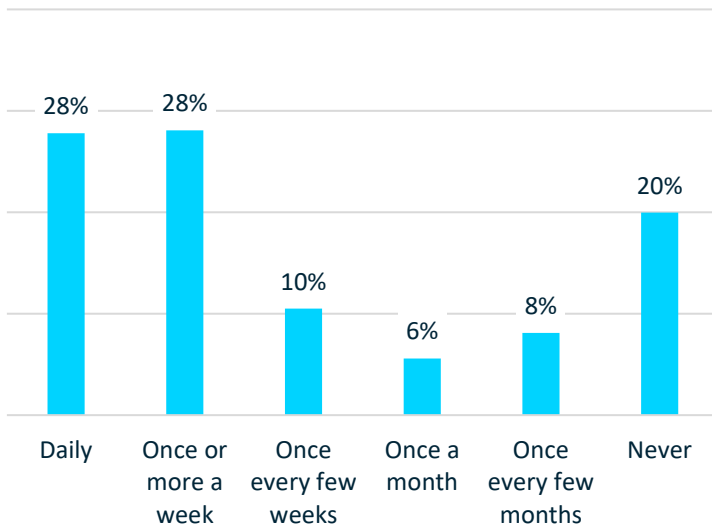


# Frequency of activities to manage drug therapy

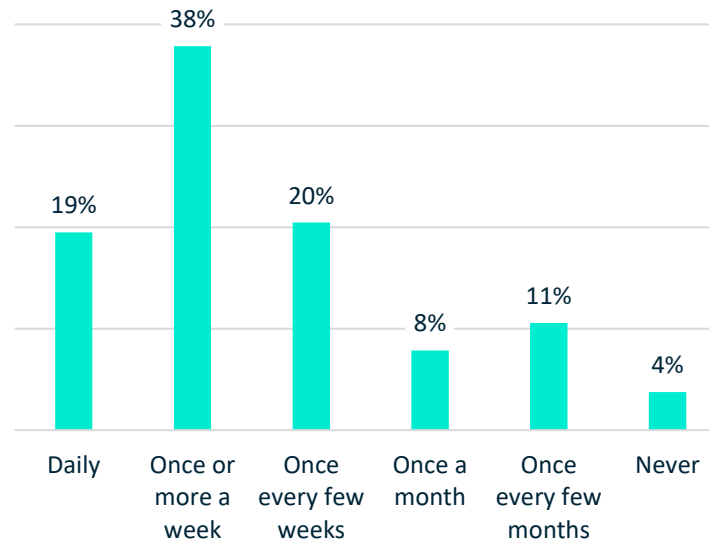
*Medication delivery, accepting a verbal Rx and transferring an Rx are the activities conducted most frequently for opioids and other controlled substances under the exemptions, with half of respondents performing these activities at least once per week.*

In the past year, how often have you conducted the following activities to manage your patients' opioid or controlled substance drug therapy?

## Delivery of medication by staff

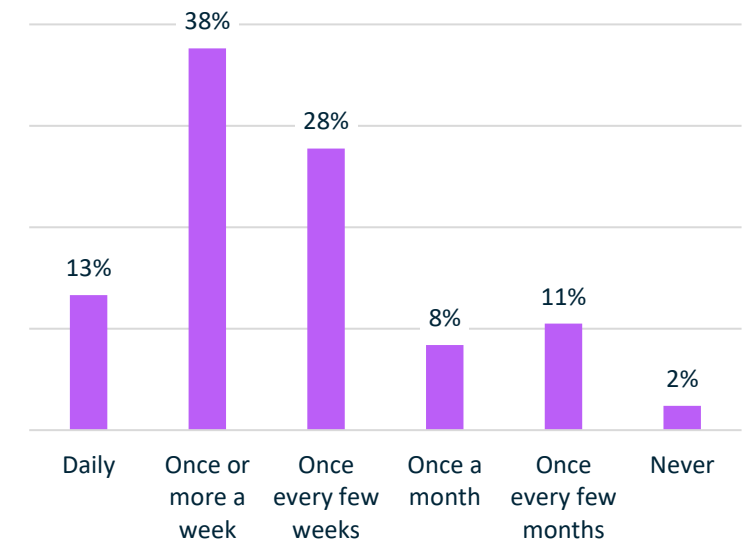


## Accept a verbal prescription



No authority in NL. NL responses excluded.

## Transfer Rx to another pharmacy



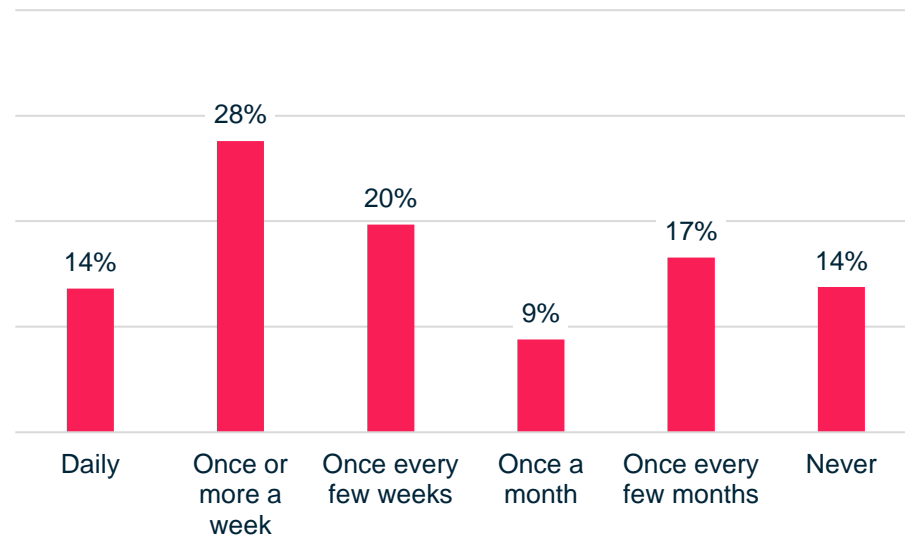
No authority in MB. MB responses excluded.

# Frequency of activities to manage drug therapy

*Extending/renewing prescriptions and adapting prescriptions are activities performed less frequently by pharmacists. However, over half of respondents extend prescriptions and over a third adapt prescriptions at least once every few weeks.*

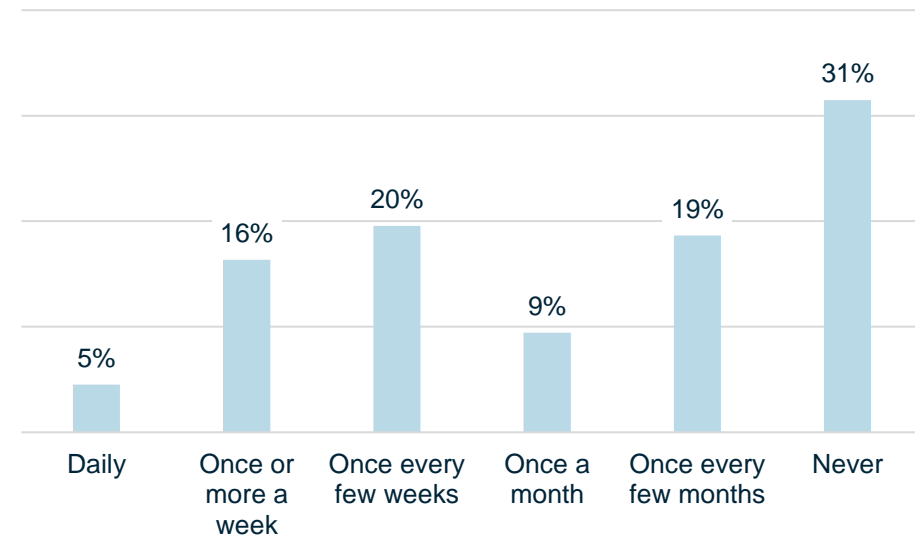
In the past year, how often have you conducted the following activities to manage your patients' opioid or controlled substance drug therapy?

## Extend/renew a prescription



No authority in BC, MB, NU. These responses excluded.

## Adapt a prescription

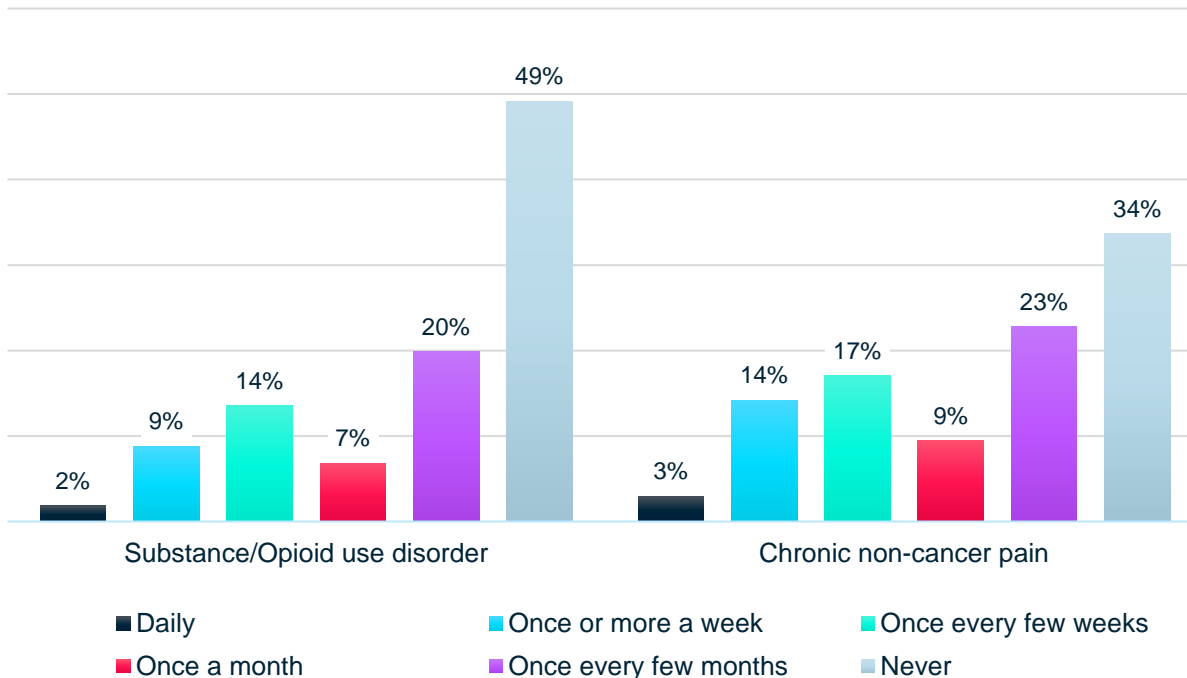


No authority in BC, AB, SK, PE, NL, YT, NT, NU. These responses excluded.

# Specific indications and medications

While almost half of respondents have **never extended, renewed or adapted opioids for substance/opioid use disorder**, about a third of respondents have done so at least once per month. Over 40% of respondents have extended or adapted opioids for chronic non-cancer pain at least once per month.

In the past year, how often have you extended, renewed or adapted opioids for the following indications?



## Other controlled substances

In the past year, what other types of controlled substances have you extended, renewed or adapted?

Methadone Suboxone Oxycocet zopiclone Oxyneo Pain\_kadian  
 morphine Opioid Methadone Gabapentin  
 lorazepam clonazepam etc\_ Nabilone  
 Benzodiazepines\_hydromorph contin  
 ADHD meds and stimulants narcotic  
 Other controlled drugs chronic pain  
 Testosterone\_ oxycodone opioids phenobarbital  
 suboxone tramadol hydromorphone\_anxiety Tylenol  
 Zopiclone Tramadol cancer pain

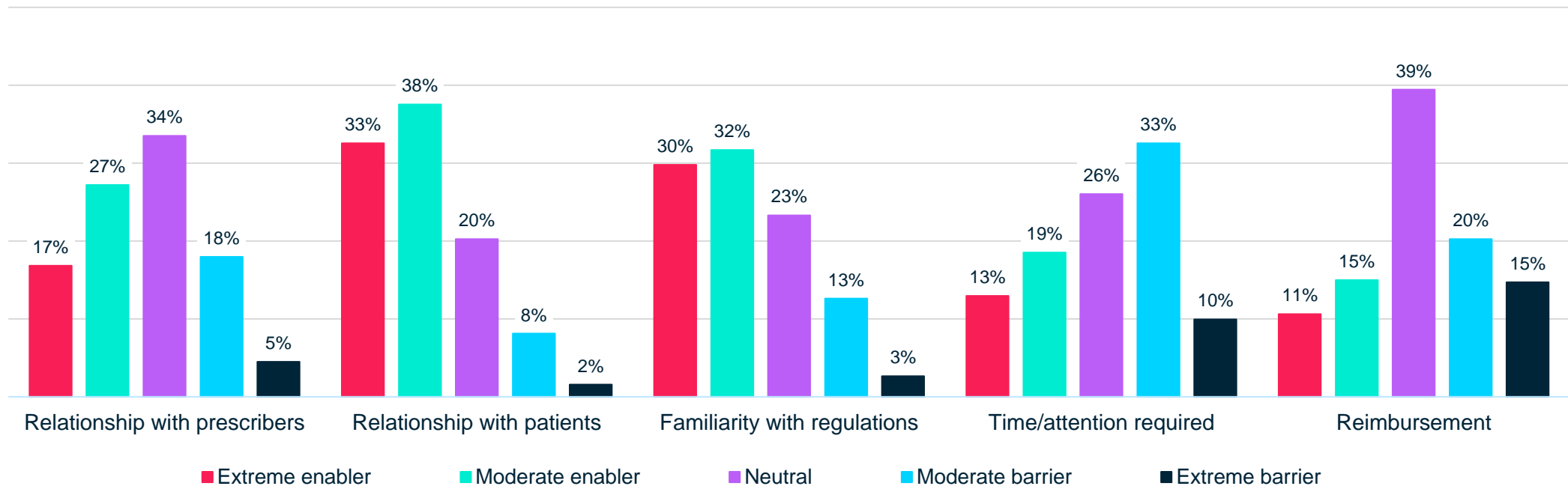
# Enablers, barriers and impact of the CDSA exemptions



# Enablers and barriers to CDSA exemptions

*Few respondents identified **any extreme barriers** to implementing the CDSA exemptions, however a third of respondents identified the time and attention required as a moderate barrier. Pharmacists' relationships with their patients and their familiarity with the regulations were identified as notable **enablers**.*

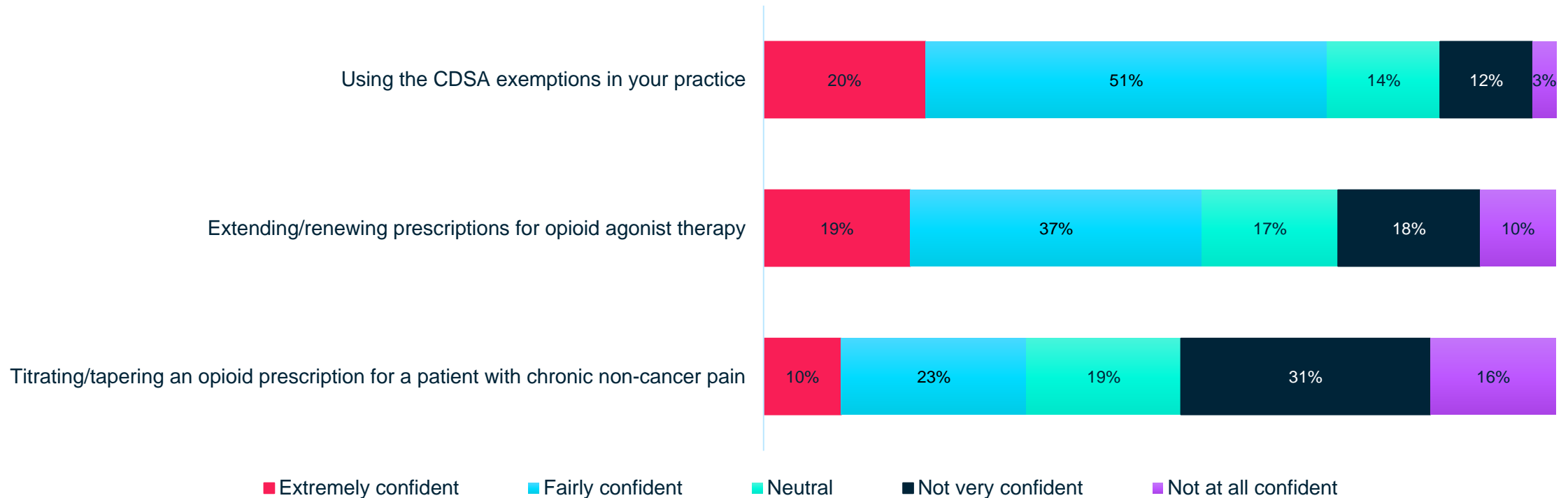
In your practice, would you consider the following to be enablers or barriers to your willingness to extend, renew or adapt prescriptions for opioids and controlled substances?



# Pharmacists' confidence using the exemptions

While most respondents are at least **fairly confident** using the CDSA exemptions and extending/ renewing opioid agonist therapy, almost half indicated a **lack of confidence in titrating/tapering an opioid** for chronic non-cancer pain.

How would you rate your confidence in the following:

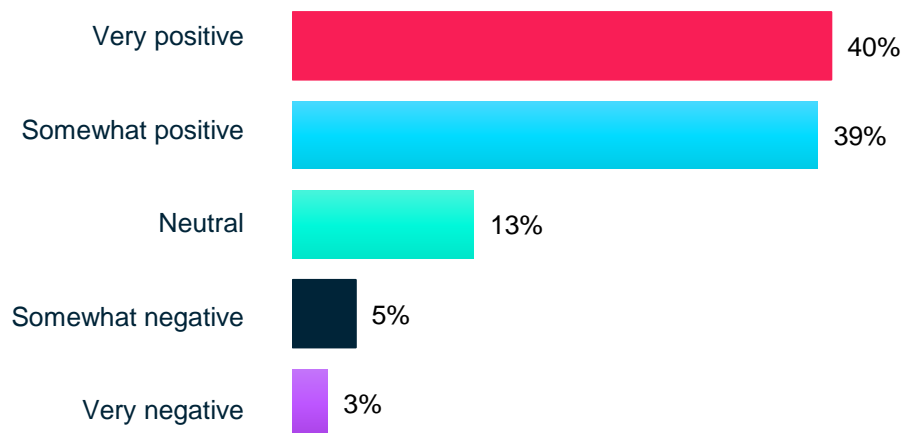


# Impact of the CDSA exemptions on patients and practice

Most pharmacists believe the CDSA exemptions have had a **positive impact** on patients (79%) and on various aspects of their practice (53%-70%).

## Impact on patients

In your opinion, have the CDSA exemptions had a positive or negative impact on patients?



## Impact on practice

What impact have the CDSA exemptions had on your practice?

