



All Wales Therapeutics & Toxicology Centre
Canolfan Therapiwteg a Thocsicoleg Cymru Gyfan

In focus report: Tramadol

April 2026



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All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre. In focus report: Tramadol. April 2026.

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National Prescribing Indicators (NPIs) 2023 – 2024: A focus on tramadol

This report provides supplementary information to that contained within the [NPI quarterly reports](#) in order to provide a more detailed picture of prescribing by GP practices across Wales. NHS Wales network users can access the data used to create the graphs in this report via the interactive Server for Prescribing Information and Reporting ([SPIRA](#)) dashboards.

Since the introduction of the tramadol NPI in 2014-15, prescribing has steadily decreased across all health boards in Wales, however there continues to be variation in prescribing when comparing GP practices and clusters across Wales, and within health boards, as demonstrated by Figures 1, 2 and 3.

[Figure 1](#) shows GP practice performance from Q3 2021 to Q3 2023. The box and whisker plots show the median and quartiles for each health board. A trend line indicating the mean is also included.

[Figure 2](#) shows tramadol prescribing for 2 practices in Cardiff and Vale UHB.

[Figure 3](#) shows the trend line for every cluster from Q3 2021 to Q3 2023.

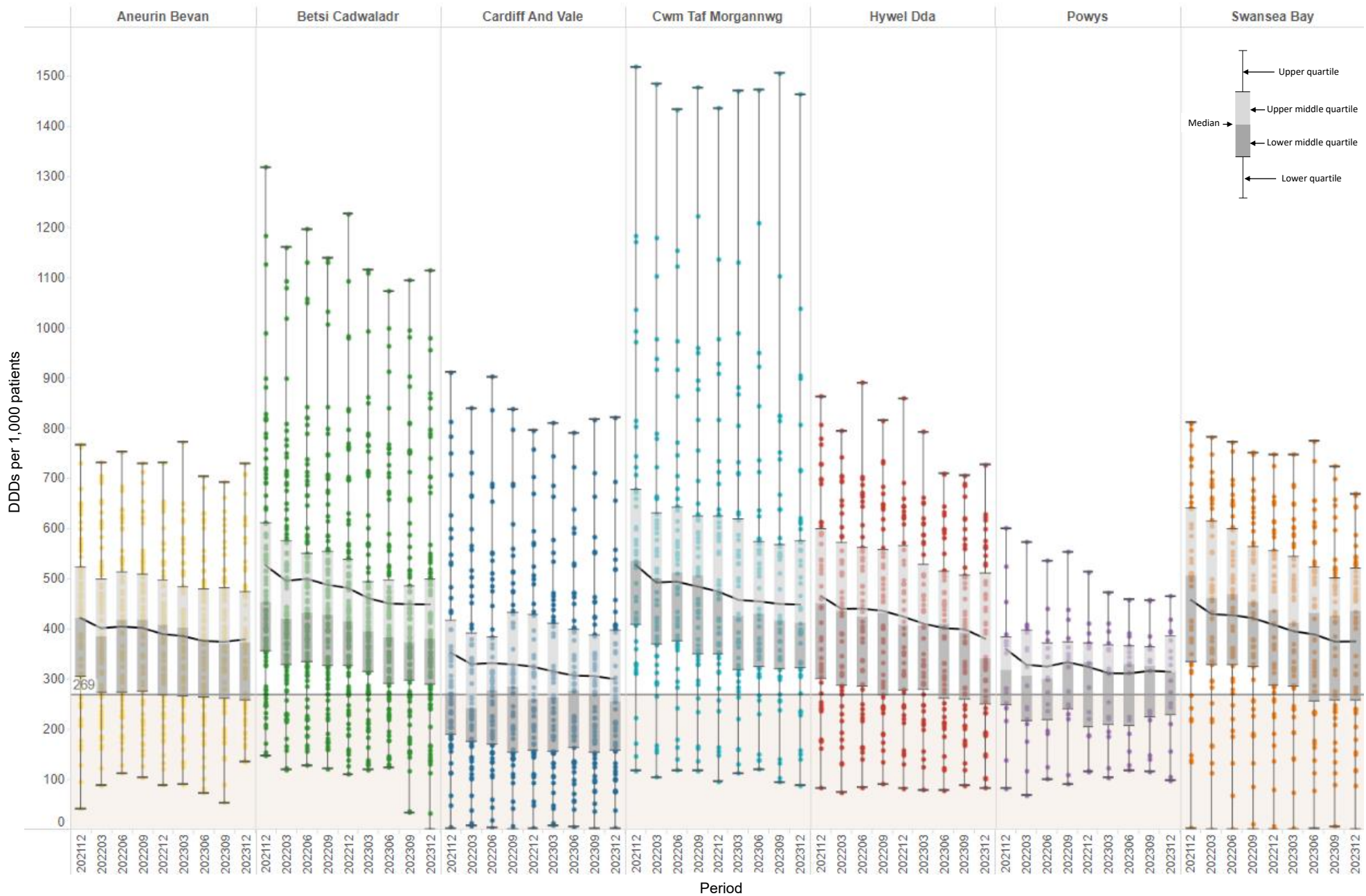
The target is for GP practices to maintain performance levels within the lower quartile (threshold: 269 DDDs¹ per 1,000 patients), or show a reduction towards the quartile below.

[Figure 4](#) highlights the percentage of practices below the threshold (performing within the lower quartile), moving towards the threshold and moving away from the threshold.

[Figure 5](#) highlights the percentage of practices that met the target (maintain performance levels within the lower quartile, or show a reduction towards the quartile below), by health board.

¹ **DDD** – The defined daily dose (DDD), developed by the World Health Organization, is a unit of measurement whereby each medicine is assigned a value within its recognised dosage range. The value is the assumed average maintenance dose per day for a medicine when used for its main indication in adults. A medicine can have different DDDs depending on the route of administration.

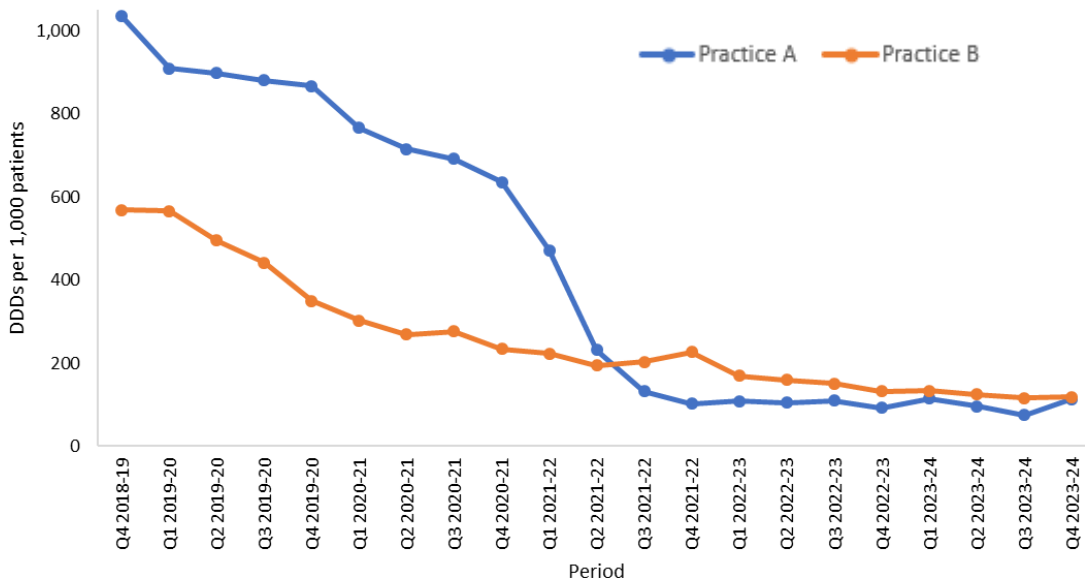
Figure 1. Box and Whisker plot - Tramadol DDDs per 1,000 patients from Q3 2021 to Q3 2023



Good practice spotlight

Two practices (referred to as Practice A and Practice B) in Cardiff and Vale UHB who have demonstrated reductions in tramadol prescribing and maintained it over a couple of years were contacted. Both practices report using similar methods.

Figure 2. Trend in tramadol prescribing for practices in Cardiff and Vale UHB



Practice A made a concerted effort to review all their tramadol patients a couple of years ago and enlisted the help of a cluster pharmacist. They took a strong approach to patients that wouldn't attend for review, essentially deciding to reduce and stop if they were no show. A change in staff probably altered the prescribing habits of the practice as well.

Practice B removed tramadol off the repeat prescription for most patients and encouraged patients to attend for a review which allowed for a dose reduction in many patients.

Both practices don't start tramadol in new patients. Any patients that join the practice on tramadol are flagged for an early review. They have both continued to "stay strong" and believe these methods have proved effective because of a consistent practice approach.

Figure 3. Trend in tramadol prescribing by cluster



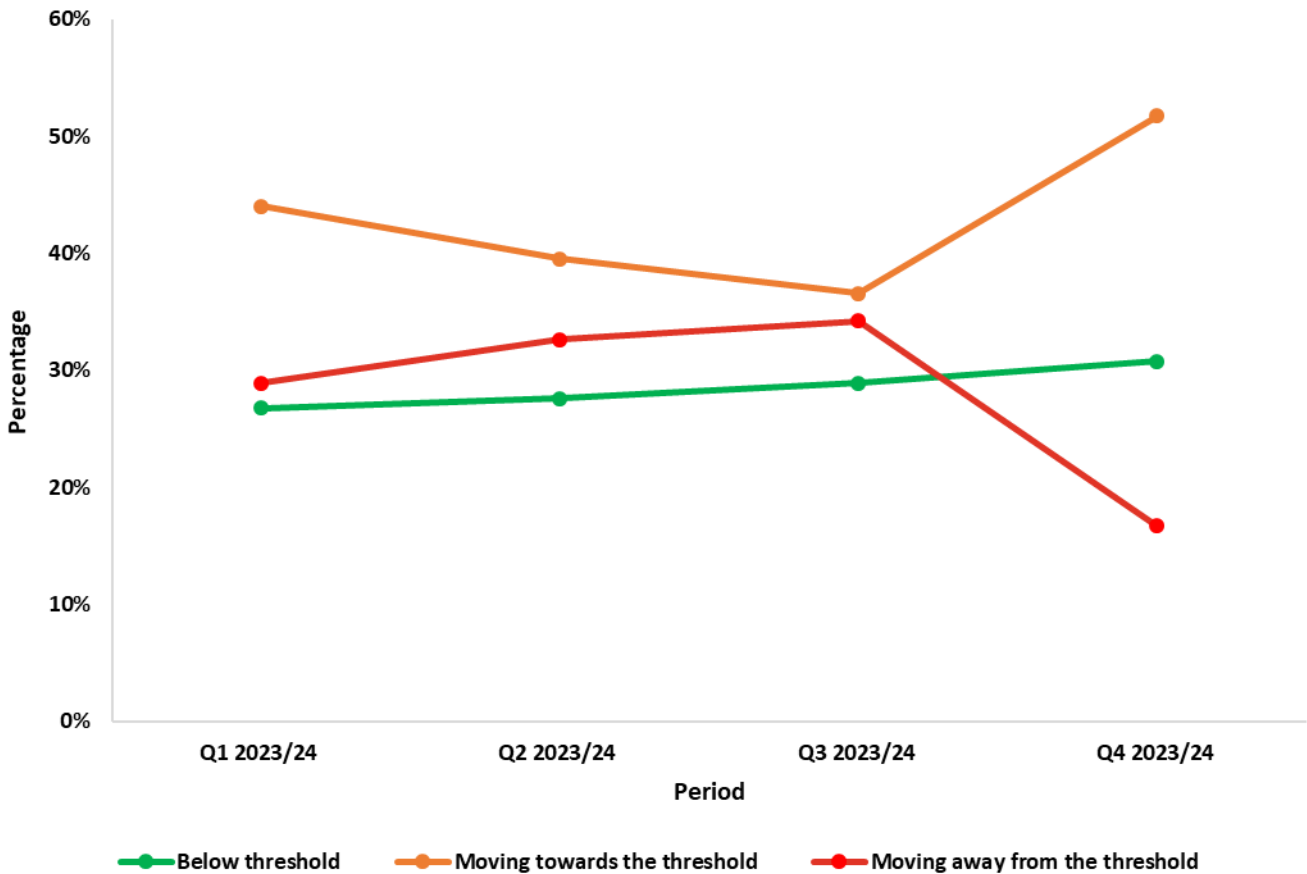
Threshold achievement

The target is for GP practices to maintain performance levels within the lower quartile or show a reduction towards the quartile below. A threshold is set at the prescribing rate of the best performing 25% of GP practices in Wales. For 2023-2024, the threshold for the lower quartile (based on data from the quarter ending December 2022) is 269 DDDs per 1,000 patients.

Figure 3 shows the percentage of practices:

- Below the threshold (practice mean tramadol prescribing is equal to or less than 269 DDDs per 1,000 patients for that quarter).
- Moving towards the threshold (practice mean tramadol prescribing is greater than 269 DDDs per 1,000 patients but has decreased compared to the previous quarter).
- Moving away from the threshold (practice mean tramadol prescribing is greater than 269 DDDs per 1,000 patients and has increased compared to the previous quarter).

Figure 4. Trend in percentage of practices that are below, moving towards, and moving away from the lower quartile threshold



Target achievement

Practices can meet the target by maintaining prescribing at or below the threshold, or by demonstrating a reduction in prescribing and therefore moving towards the quartile below. Figure 4 shows the percentage of practices within the health board that are meeting the target.

Figure 5. Trend in percentage of practices that met the target, by health board

