

Regional variations in opioid use patterns among treatment-seeking opioid users in Central and Western Canada

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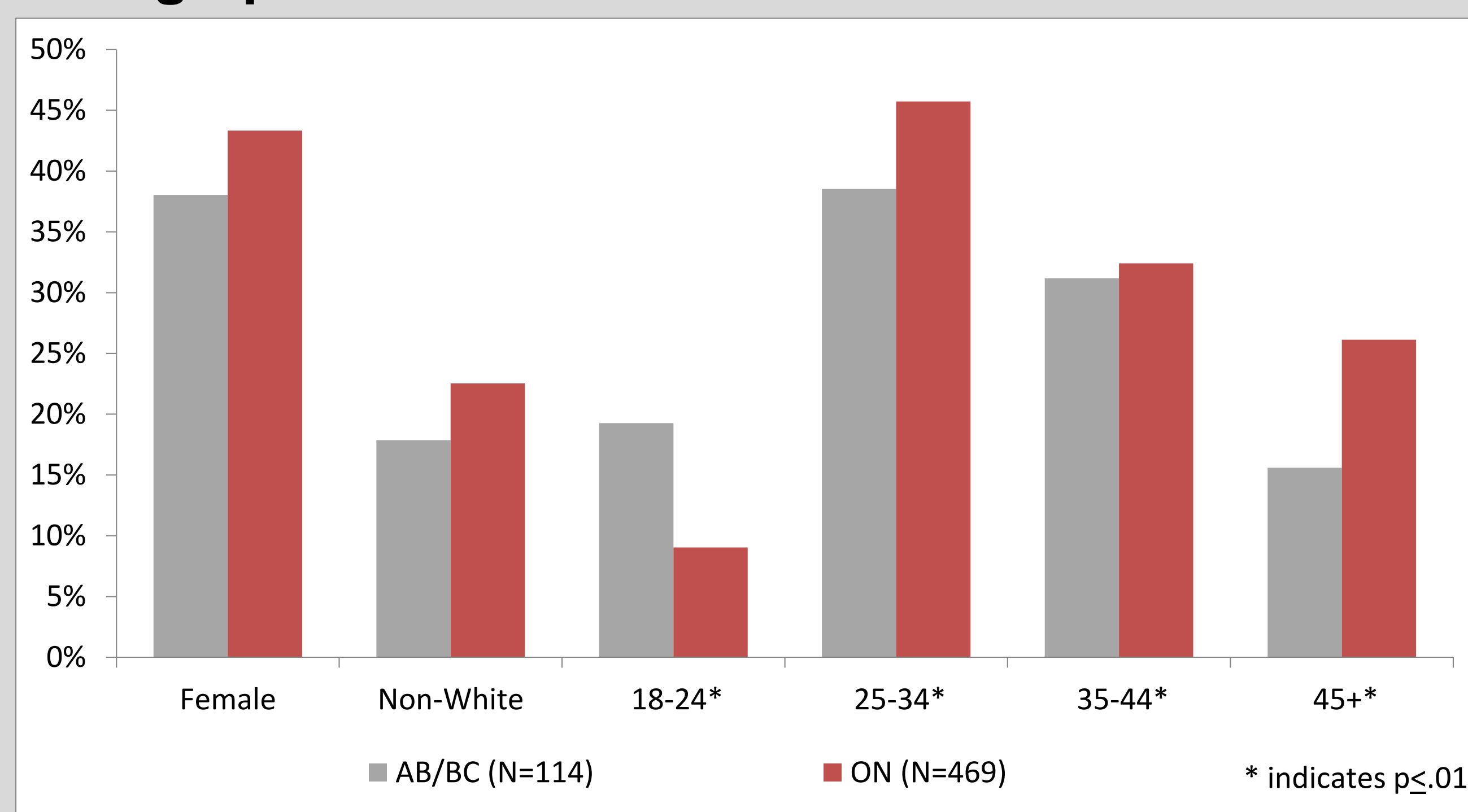
Background

- Opioid epidemics stem from a number of influential factors that span multiple levels of the social-ecological model. These can include environmental (i.e., drug markets), institutional (i.e., prescription rates), and community (i.e., culture) factors that can significantly differ from one region of a country to another.
- Targeted regional public health responses can often be more effective and successful than national ones.
- This study sought to explore regional differences in current opioid use patterns between Central and Western Canada.

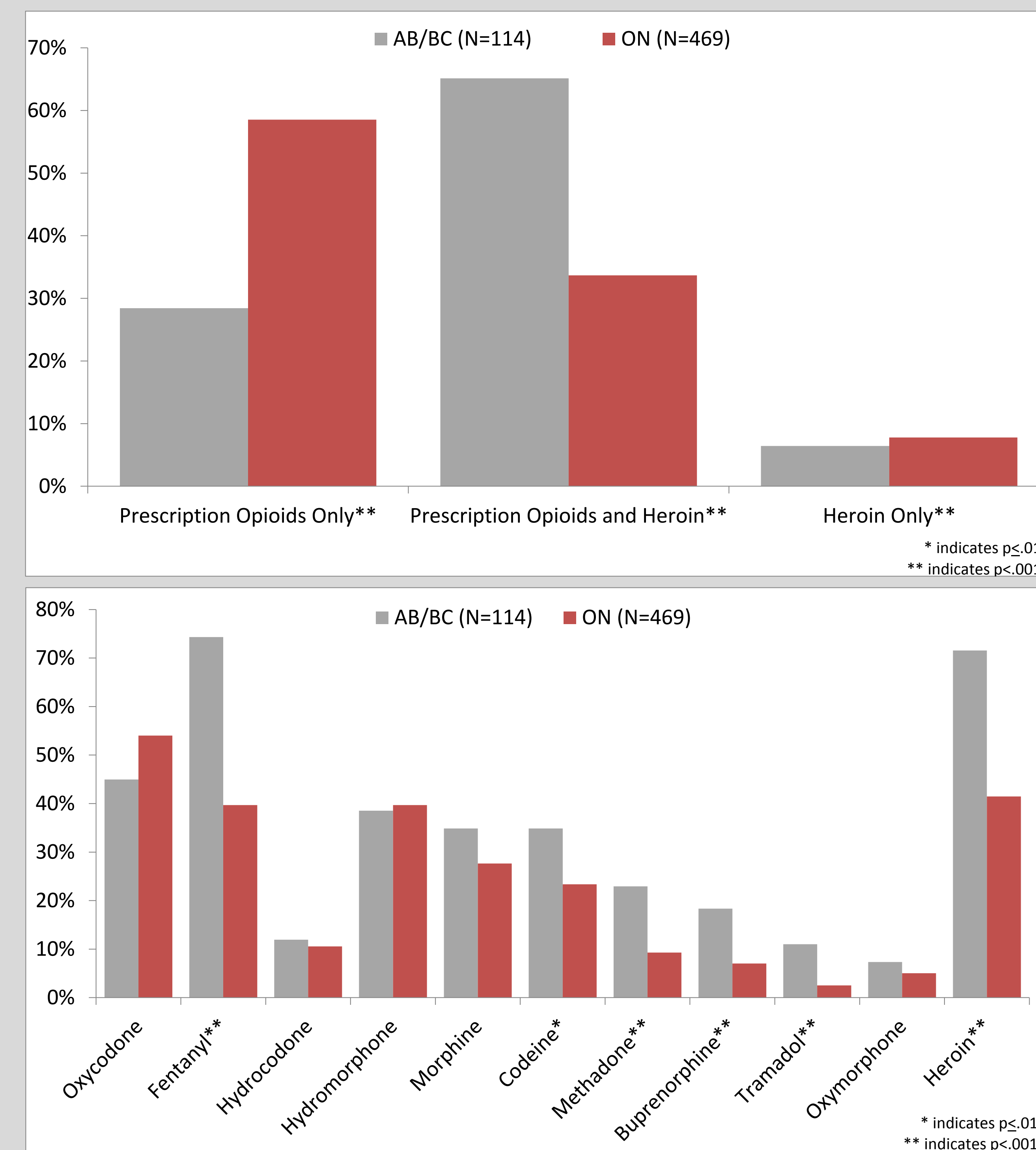
Methods

- Substance abuse treatment programs in Central (Ontario, n=469) or Western Canada (British Columbia/Alberta, n=114) recruited patients entering treatment for an opioid use disorder in 2017
- Participants were surveyed about substance use patterns in the past month, along with demographic variables, as part of the Opioid Dependence Treatment Program Survey

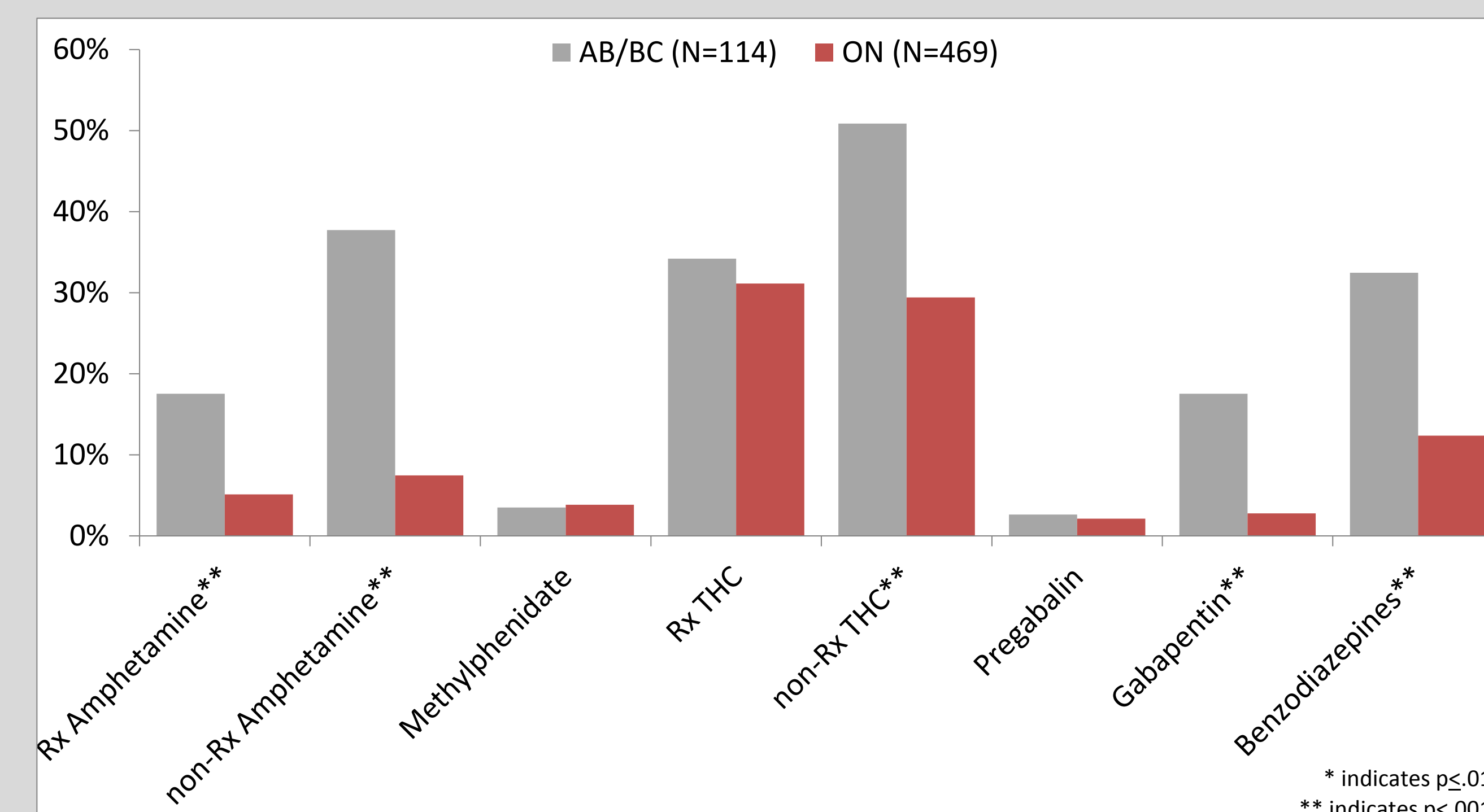
Demographics



Past Month Opioid Use



Past Month Non-Opioid Use



Results

- Past month opioid use significantly differed between Western and Central Canada, with the majority of those in Ontario using much more prescription opioids alone (58.5% vs. 28.4%, p<0.001), compared to British Columbia/Alberta in which both prescription opioids AND heroin (65.1% vs. 33.7%, p<0.001) were used.
- Fentanyl use was also much more common in Western Canada (74.3% vs. 39.7%, p<0.001).
- In Western Canada, non-prescription THC (50.9% vs. 29.4%, p<0.001), non-prescription amphetamines (37.7% vs. 7.5%, p<0.001) and benzodiazepines (32.5% vs. 12.4%, p<0.001) were more common.
- Interestingly, there were no significant differences in gender or ethnicity between treatment-seeking opioid users in Western vs. Central Canada, but Western Canada saw a higher prevalence of younger opioid users compared to Central Canada's older opioid users.

Conclusions

- Prescription opioid use appears to be the dominant form of opioid use in Central Canada
- Western Canada has higher rates of co-occurring heroin and prescription opioid abuse, fentanyl abuse and abuse of non-opioid drugs.
- These data suggest regional variations in opioid use need to be better understood in order to more effectively allocate and implement targeted policy responses to the Canadian opioid epidemic.