

# Unrestricted Insurance Coverage of On-Label Buprenorphine Formulations Remains Sparse in Comparison to Conventional Opioids

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## Background

Buprenorphine has a more favorable safety profile than conventional opioids or tramadol [1,2], with equal or superior analgesic efficacy [3,4].

It was reported in 2019 that access to on-label buprenorphine formulations was limited in comparison to conventional opioids [5], despite evidence supporting buprenorphine use as a first-line analgesic.

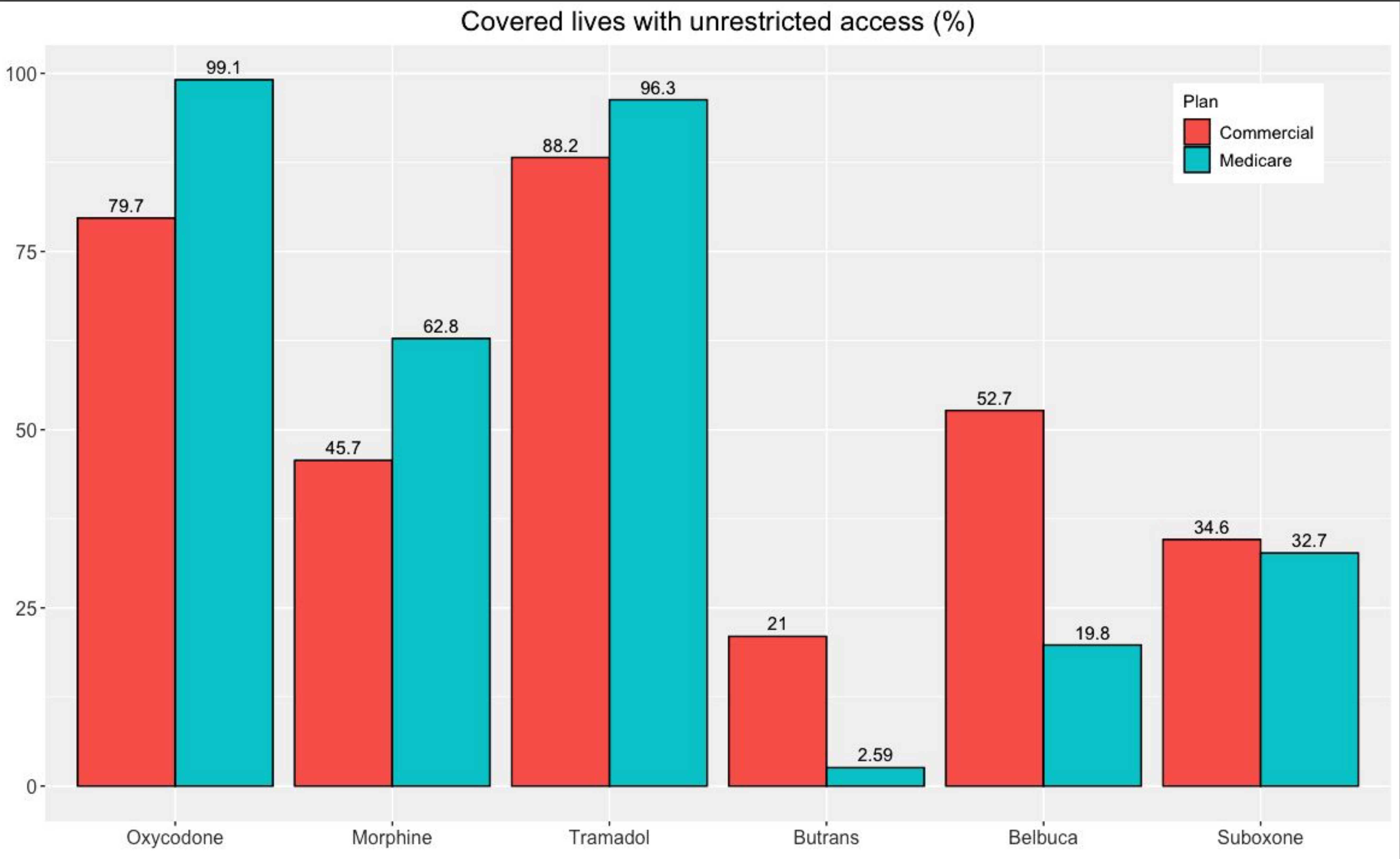
In light of policy changes increasing buprenorphine accessibility, we sought to determine differences in unrestricted health insurance coverage between on-label buprenorphine formulations, conventional opioids, and tramadol.

## Methods

We used data from Managed Market Insights and Technology’s Coverage Search application and the KFF Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population page to estimate percentages of US covered lives with unrestricted access to oxycodone instant release, morphine extended release, tramadol (oral), transdermal buprenorphine (Butrans, Purdue Pharma), buprenorphine buccal film (Belbuca, Endo Pharmaceuticals), and sublingual buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone, Indivior).

>79% of the insured US population can get **oxycodone without restrictions.**

**Less than half** have unrestricted access to on-label buprenorphine.



## Discussion Points

- Generic buprenorphine formulations are entering the market.
- There is no generic formulation for buccal buprenorphine, which is considered safest and most effective for pain management.
- Barriers to buprenorphine access include cost, dose limits, prior authorization/step edit requirements, and mandatory drug screenings.
- No plans in Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, or Rhode Island provide unrestricted access to Butrans.

## Conclusion

Health insurance restrictions for on-label buprenorphine coverage exceed those of more dangerous opioids, contradicting scientific consensus, and needlessly endangering patients. We recommend the expeditious removal of such restrictions.

## References

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