

# **2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

**First results**

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# **2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

**First results**

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### **Australian Institute of Health and Welfare**

Board Chair  
Hon. Peter Collins, QC, AM

Director  
Dr Richard Madden

Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Mark Cooper-Stanbury  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
GPO Box 570  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Phone: (02) 6289 7027

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# Foreword

This report presents the summary results from the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey and is the thirteenth report in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) Drug Statistics Series. The main survey report – subtitled *Detailed Findings* – will be published later in 2005.

The AIHW undertook the survey at the request of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. The survey project was approved by both the AIHW Health Ethics Committee and the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing's Ethics Committee. For the second time, the survey was conducted under AIHW legislation, providing a very high level of protection to the personal information collected in the survey.

Custody of the survey data set rests with the AIHW and is protected by the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*. Public use of the confidentialised data set is available through the Australian Social Science Data Archives at the Australian National University.

The release of *First Results* represents a timely and substantial contribution to research and debate on the drug-related knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of Australians.

I am pleased that the AIHW has been able to undertake this important survey on a topic of high policy concern to all levels of government and the community.

I would like to pay particular tribute to Amber Summerill for her role in managing the survey and authoring the report, to co-authors Suraiya Nargis and Mark Cooper-Stanbury, and the department's officers who worked closely with the AIHW team in all phases of the survey.

The participation of almost 30,000 Australians in a survey of a highly personal nature is very much appreciated.

Richard Madden  
Director  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
April 2005

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# Summary

## The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey was conducted between June and November 2004. This was the eighth and largest survey in a series which commenced in 1985, and was the third to be managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Almost 30,000 Australians aged 12 years and older participated in the survey, in which they were asked about their knowledge of and attitudes towards drugs, their drug consumption histories, and related behaviours. To enable comparisons over time, many of the analyses reported in the 2004 First Results report are based on the population aged 14 years and over.

### Tobacco

Almost half of Australians aged 14 years and over had smoked 100 cigarettes or the equivalent amount of tobacco at some time in their lives, but one in five had smoked in the last 12 months. The proportion of the population aged 14 years and over who smoked daily declined by two percentage points between 2001 and 2004, to 17.4%. However, the average age at which smokers took up tobacco remained stable at 16 years.

Tobacco was thought to be associated with a drug 'problem' by 3.3% of Australians aged 14 years and over and 39.3% accepted the regular use of tobacco by adults. Tobacco was the second most accessible drug: one in every two Australians aged 14 years and over was offered or had the opportunity to use tobacco in the last 12 months.

Daily smokers were more likely than other recent smokers or non-smokers to report high or very high levels of psychological distress.

### Alcohol

Nine out of every ten Australians aged 14 years and over had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and 83.6% had consumed alcohol in the 12 months preceding the 2004 survey.

The proportion of the population drinking daily remained stable (8.9%) between 2001 and 2004 as did the average age at which people had their first full serve of alcohol (17 years of age). The proportion of teenagers drinking at least weekly (around 25%) declined over the period.

One in seven people admitted to driving a motor vehicle and one in 17 verbally abused someone while under the influence of alcohol. One-quarter of Australians aged 14 years and over had been verbally abused and 4.4% had been physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol.

Alcohol was thought to be associated with a drug 'problem' by one in ten Australians (10%) aged 14 years and over, whereas 77.0% accepted the regular use of alcohol by adults. Alcohol

was the most accessible drug: four in five Australians aged 14 years and over were offered or had the opportunity to use alcohol in the last 12 months.

High-risk and risky drinkers were more likely than low-risk drinkers or abstainers to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress.

## **Illicit drugs**

Almost two in every five Australians had used an illicit drug at some time in their lives and almost one in seven had used illicit drugs in the previous 12 months.

Between 2001 and 2004, there was a decline in the proportion of the population, from 16.9% to 15.3%, who had used an illicit drug in the past 12 months. Recent marijuana/cannabis use, in particular, has dropped significantly between 2001 and 2004, from 12.9% to 11.3%.

The average age at which new users first tried illicit drugs increased to 19.4 years of age. The most accessible illicit drugs were painkillers/analgesics and marijuana/cannabis – 41.3% and 20.6% of the population respectively were offered or had the opportunity to use these drugs.

Driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of illicit drugs was reported by 3.3% of Australians aged 14 years or over. One in ten persons were verbally abused and one in 60 were physically abused by someone affected by illicit drugs.

Almost nine in every ten Australians aged 14 years and over primarily associated an illicit drug with a drug 'problem'. Although the proportion of Australians approving the regular use of illicit drugs was low, one in five accepted the regular use of marijuana by adults.

Almost two in five persons who used an illicit drug in the past month reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.

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## **Questionnaire**

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# Abbreviations and symbols

## Abbreviations

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interview
CURF	Confidentialised unit record file
MCDS	Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy
NCADA	National Campaign Against Drug Abuse
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NDS	National Drug Strategy
SE	Standard error
RSE	Relative standard error

## Symbols

–	nil, or rounded to zero
..	not applicable
#	2004 result significantly different from 2001 result (2-tailed $\alpha = 0.05$ )
n.a.	not available