



Alcohol and other drug treatment services in the Northern Territory 2008–09

Findings from the National Minimum Data Set (NMDS)

Highlights

In the Northern Territory in 2008–09, 21 government-funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies provided 3,757 treatment episodes. This represented 1 extra treatment agency and around 50 extra treatment episodes compared with 2007–08.

The median¹ age of persons receiving treatment for their own drug use was 31 years. The median age of people seeking treatment in relation to someone else’s drug in 2008–09 was the same as for 2007–08 (32 years).

Alcohol accounted for 71% of treatment episodes in 2008–09, followed by cannabis (11%) and opioids (9%, with morphine accounting for 7% of all principal drugs of concern).

The most common form of main treatment provided was assessment only (33% of episodes), followed by counselling (17%), withdrawal management (detoxification) (15%) and rehabilitation (14%). The proportion of counselling treatment episodes decreased from 21% of episodes in 2007–08 to 17% in 2008–09.

¹ The median is the midpoint of a list of observations ranked from the smallest to the largest.

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About this bulletin

This bulletin summarises the main findings from the 2008–09 Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services (AODTS) NMDS data for the Northern Territory. More detailed information about the 2008–09 collection and its findings can be found in the publication *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2008–09: report on the National Minimum Data Set* (AIHW 2010). This report, together with further publications and interactive data, can be accessed online at <www.aihw.gov.au/drugs>.

Scope of the AODTS–NMDS

The agencies and clients that were in scope for the 2008–09 AODTS–NMDS collection were:

- all publicly funded (at state, territory and/or Australian Government level) government and non-government agencies that provide one or more specialist alcohol and/or other drug treatment services
- all clients who had completed one or more treatment episodes at an alcohol and other drug treatment service that was in scope during the period 1 July 2008 to 30 June 2009.

It is important to note that the AODTS–NMDS collection includes pharmacotherapy clients only when they receive both pharmacotherapy and another type of treatment (from the same treatment agency). Pharmacotherapy-only clients are reported under the National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data collection (NOPSAD).

For a complete list of clients and agencies excluded from the AODTS–NMDS, see Section 1.2 of the *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2008–09: report on the National Minimum Data Set* (AIHW 2010).

Collection count: closed treatment episodes

The unit of measurement in this bulletin is the ‘closed treatment episode’. A closed treatment episode refers to a period of contact, with defined start and end dates, between a client and a treatment agency. It is possible that more than one treatment episode may be in progress for a client at any one time, or that a client can have more than one treatment episode; therefore the number of closed treatment episodes captured in the AODTS–NMDS does not equate to the total number of persons in Australia receiving treatment for alcohol and other drugs.

Treatment agencies

Throughout Australia, a total of 653 government-funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies supplied data for 2008–09. Of these agencies, 21 were located in the Northern Territory, of which 17 were non-government agencies.

Treatment agencies in the Territory were most likely to be located in either *Remote* areas such as Alice Springs (43%), or *Outer regional* areas (43%) including Darwin.

Client profile

In the Northern Territory, there were 3,757 closed treatment episodes in alcohol and other drug treatment services reported in the 2008–09 AODTS–NMDS collection, similar to 2007–08. The vast majority (94%) of closed treatment episodes in the Territory involved clients seeking treatment for their own drug use. The remaining 6% involved clients seeking treatment for another person's alcohol or other drug use.

Age and sex

The overall proportions of male and female clients in the Northern Territory (65% and 35%, respectively) were similar to the national proportions (67% and 33%, respectively). However, of those treatment episodes reported for someone else's drug use in the Territory, females accounted for the majority (58% of treatment episodes).

In the Northern Territory, the median age of persons receiving treatment for their own drug use was 31 years. Of people seeking treatment in relation to someone else's drug use, the median age was 32 years.

Around 30% of closed treatment episodes in the Territory were for clients aged 20–29 years; another 28% were for clients aged 30–39 years.

Special population groups

The proportion of closed treatment episodes involving clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was much higher in the Northern Territory than nationally (61% compared with 12%). In the Territory, Indigenous status was not stated in around 2% of treatment episodes in 2008–09. Total treatment episodes for Indigenous Australians need to be interpreted with caution because some Australian Government-funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander substance use specific services may not be included in the Northern Territory's data. Primary health care services are also not included.

The majority (80%) of closed treatment episodes in the Northern Territory were for clients born in Australia and 63% of treatment episodes were for clients whose preferred language was English. One quarter (26%) of episodes in the Northern Territory were for clients whose preferred language was an Australian Indigenous language.

Drugs of concern

This section reports only on the 3,521 closed treatment episodes where clients were seeking treatment for their own alcohol or other drug use in the Northern Territory.

Principal drug of concern

The principal drug of concern refers to the main substance that the client states led them to seek treatment from the alcohol and other drug treatment agency. In the Northern Territory in 2008–09, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in closed treatment episodes (71%), followed by cannabis (11%) and opioids (9%, with morphine accounting for 7%) (see Table 1). Clients in the Territory were more likely to receive treatment for alcohol and morphine, and less likely to receive treatment for heroin and cannabis, compared with the national rate.

Table 1: Principal drug of concern^(a), Northern Territory and Australia, 2001–02 to 2008–09 (per cent)

Principal drug of concern	Northern Territory								Total (Australia) 2008–09	
	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07 ^(b)	2007–08	2008–09	Per cent	Number
Alcohol	64.3	71.7	77.2	64.4	63.0	63.4	73.1	70.7	45.8	63,272
Amphetamines	8.6	6.4	4.5	5.2	3.8	4.8	2.4	2.4	9.2	12,739
Benzodiazepines	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.4	1.5	2,080
Cannabis	11.0	9.2	7.9	13.5	14.4	13.2	9.7	10.5	22.5	31,100
Cocaine	—	0.2	0.1	—	—	—	—	—	0.3	479
Ecstasy	—	—	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	1.0	1,397
Nicotine	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.4	3.8	0.4	0.7	1.8	2,461
Opioids										
Heroin	2.1	1.5	0.9	1.3	0.8	0.6	1.2	0.8	10.3	14,222
Methadone	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.6	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.5	1.5	2,136
Morphine	8.4	6.0	5.3	10.1	10.0	7.8	7.1	7.1	1.4	1,877
Total opioids ^(c)	11.2	8.1	6.8	12.0	11.8	8.8	8.7	9.1	15.1	20,890
All other drugs ^(d)	2.0	2.3	1.5	3.0	4.5	5.1	4.8	5.9	2.6	3,609
Not stated	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total (per cent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	2,007	1,961	2,337	2,116	2,283	2,217	3,496	3,521	..	138,027

(a) Excludes treatment episodes for clients seeking treatment for the drug use of others.

(b) The number of treatment episodes may be under-counted due to technical difficulties, which led to the exclusion of data from one in-scope agency and under-reporting of episodes by government agencies for two quarters.

(c) Total opioids includes the balance of opioids apart from heroin, methadone and morphine.

(d) Includes balance of principal drugs of concern coded according to the Australian Standard Classification of Drugs of Concern.

Over time, the Northern Territory has consistently provided the majority (63% to 77%) of treatment episodes to people who identify alcohol as their principal drug of concern. Nationally the trend has fluctuated between 37% and 46%.

There was little change in the proportion of treatment episodes for each principal drug of concern in 2008–09 for the Territory compared with the previous year (2007–08).

Age and sex

Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern for clients in all age groups in 2008–09. In 2006–07, the 10–19 year age group reported cannabis as the most common principal drug of concern; however, the proportion of treatment episodes for cannabis has declined notably since then, accounting for less than 17% in 2008–09. Alcohol now accounts for 54% of treatment episodes for this age group.

Special population groups

In 2008–09, treatment episodes involving clients identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory were most likely to involve alcohol as the principal drug of concern (83% compared with 51% for non-Indigenous Australians), followed by 'other drugs' (8% compared with 4% for non-Indigenous Australians).

All drugs of concern

All drugs of concern refers to all drugs reported by clients, including the principal drug of concern and all other drugs of concern (clients can report up to five other drugs of concern).

Around 38% of treatment episodes in the Northern Territory involved at least one other drug of concern (in addition to the principal drug of concern). In these episodes, 1,351 instances of other drugs of concern were recorded. This is a large increase from the previous year when only 13% of treatment episodes involved other drugs of concern.

A breakdown of all drugs of concern by drug type is presented in Figure 1. For example, nicotine was reported as the principal drug of concern in less than 1% of episodes, but was reported as a drug of concern (either principal or other) in 21% of treatment episodes.

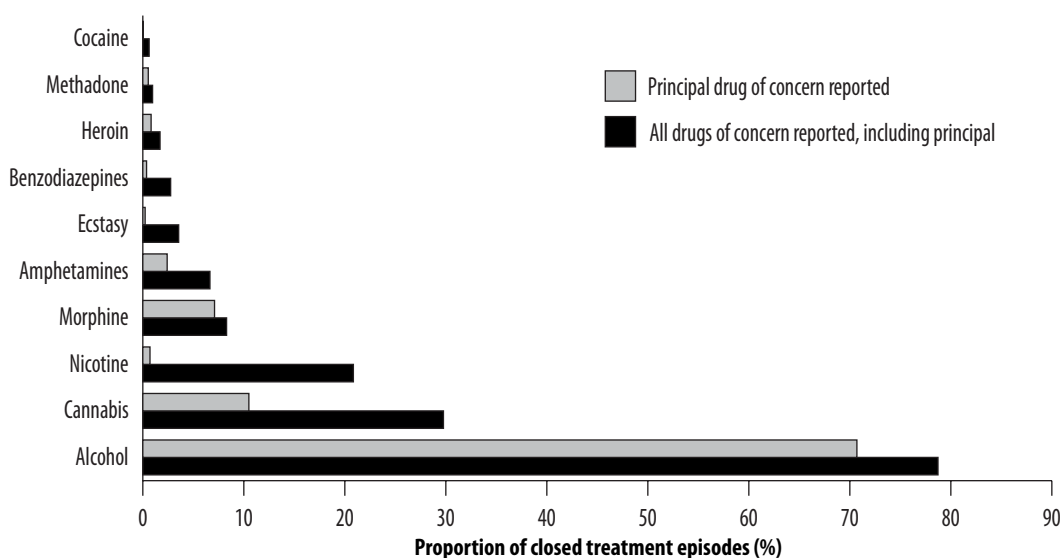


Figure 1: Principal drug of concern and all drugs of concern, Northern Territory, 2008–09

Alcohol

In the Northern Territory, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 71% of closed treatment episodes in 2008–09. Where alcohol was reported as a drug of concern, it was generally nominated as the principal drug of concern. There were less than 300 episodes in which alcohol was nominated as an additional drug of concern to the principal drug.

Of the 2,489 episodes where alcohol was nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- The majority (68%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of clients receiving treatment was 32 years (for both males and females).
- 74% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (40% of episodes), followed by referrals from court services (13%) and correctional services (11%).

Drug profile

- At least one other drug of concern was reported in 35% of alcohol-related episodes. In these episodes, 873 instances of other drugs of concern were recorded— 39% were for cannabis (only 18% in 2007–08) and 38% were for nicotine.
- The majority (83%) of episodes involved clients who reported never having injected drugs. This data item had a high proportion of not stated responses (10%).

Treatment profile

- The most common main treatment type received was assessment only (35% of episodes), followed by rehabilitation (18%) and withdrawal management (14%).
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a residential treatment facility (39% of episodes), followed by an outreach setting (25%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 7.

Cannabis

In the Northern Territory, cannabis was the second most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 11% of closed treatment episodes in 2008–09. When all drugs of concern are considered (that is, the principal drug of concern and all other drugs of concern nominated by the client), 30% of episodes included cannabis.

Of the 370 episodes where cannabis was nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- The majority (69%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of clients receiving treatment was 27 years (for both males and females).
- 38% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (35% of episodes), followed by referrals from the criminal justice system, including correctional services, police and court diversion schemes (30%).

Drug profile

- Smoking was the most common usual method of use (93%).
- At least one other drug of concern was reported in 53% of cannabis-related episodes. From these episodes, 345 other drugs of concern were recorded— 39% for alcohol, 28% for nicotine, and 11% for amphetamines.
- The majority (62%) of episodes involved clients who reported never having injected drugs. This data item had a high proportion of not stated responses (14%).

Treatment profile

- Assessment only was the most common main treatment type received (34% of episodes), followed by counselling (33%).
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (45% of episodes), followed by a residential treatment facility (40%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 12.

Morphine

- In the Northern Territory, morphine was the third most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 7% of closed treatment episodes in 2008–09. When all drugs of concern are considered (that is, the principal drug of concern and all other drugs of concern nominated by the client), 8% of episodes included morphine.

Of the 250 episodes where morphine was nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- The majority (57%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of clients receiving treatment was 34 years (males 36 years; females 33 years).
- 13% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (67% of episodes).

Drug profile

- Injection was the most common method of use (86% of episodes), followed by ingestion (13%).
- At least one other drug of concern was recorded in 40% of morphine-related episodes. In these episodes, 207 instances of other drugs of concern were recorded— 22% were for benzodiazepines, 21% for cannabis and 18% for amphetamines.
- The majority (80%) of episodes involved clients who reported as currently injecting.

Treatment profile

- The most common treatment types were 'other' (including pharmacotherapy) and withdrawal management (both accounted for 30%)
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (74% of episodes), followed by a residential treatment facility (22%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 19.

Treatment programs

The main treatment type is the principal activity that the treatment provider considers necessary for the client to complete their treatment plan for the principal drug of concern. Data presented in this section relate to clients seeking treatment for their own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, apart from the sections on principal drug of concern, which do not apply to clients seeking treatment in relation to someone else's drug use.

Of all closed treatment episodes in the Northern Territory in 2008–09, the most common form of main treatment provided was assessment only (33% of episodes), followed by counselling (17%). Nationally, 15% of episodes were assessment only and counselling accounted for 37%. It is important to note that the method of counting assessment only treatment episodes may vary between states and territories, so comparisons of data nationally and across jurisdictions should be made with caution.

Table 2: Main treatment type, Northern Territory and Australia, 2001–02 to 2008–09 (per cent)

Main treatment type	Northern Territory								Total (Australia) 2008–09	
	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07 ^(a)	2007–08	2008–09	Per cent	Number
Withdrawal management (detoxification)	21.8	8.9	8.4	11.8	14.3	11.1	14.7	15.3	16.4	23,599
Counselling	28.5	24.7	24.6	34.5	28.3	28.5	20.7	16.9	37.4	53,787
Rehabilitation	14.8	17.4	14.9	13.1	12.0	12.1	11.5	13.8	6.7	9,667
Support and case management only	2.2	3.7	0.9	1.4	1.2	4.3	6.6	6.6	8.9	12,740
Information and education only	6.9	21.4	23.9	9.0	6.9	5.3	3.3	8.5	9.2	13,283
Assessment only ^(b)	11.7	19.9	24.3	23.7	31.5	30.4	32.9	33.2	14.7	21,172
Other ^(c)	14.1	4.1	3.0	6.4	5.6	8.4	10.3	5.8	6.6	9,424
Total (per cent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0	..
Total (number)	2,405	3,032	2,692	2,426	2,453	2,470	3,712	3,757	..	143,672

(a) The number of treatment episodes may be under-counted due to technical difficulties, which led to the exclusion of data from one in-scope agency and under-reporting of episodes by government agencies for two quarters.

(b) The method of counting 'assessment only' may vary between states/territories, so comparison of data nationally and across jurisdictions should be made with caution.

(c) 'Other' includes treatment episodes where the main treatment type was reported as pharmacotherapy.

Over the period since 2001–02, the Northern Territory has consistently provided more rehabilitation as a proportion of treatment episodes (12–17%) than has been provided nationally (6–9%). The Territory has also consistently provided proportionally less counselling.

Between 2006–07 and 2008–09, the proportion of treatment episodes with counselling as the main treatment fell from 29% to 17% in the Northern Territory. There were increases in the proportions of episodes for information and education only, rehabilitation and withdrawal management.

Assessment only

The most common main treatment type reported in the Northern Territory in 2008–09 was assessment only, accounting for 33% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 1,247 episodes where assessment only was nominated as the main treatment type received in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- The vast majority (96%) of episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.
- The majority (73%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 33 years (males 32 years; females 33 years).
- 67% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (23% of episodes), followed by referrals from 'other' sources (16%).

Treatment profile

- Treatment was most likely to occur in 'other' settings (37% of episodes). Treatment was also provided in non-residential treatment settings (25%), residential settings (23%) and outreach settings (14%).
- The majority (70%) of episodes ended because the treatment was completed. The next most common reason for treatment to end was because there was a change in the main treatment type (10% of episodes ended this way) or the reason was not stated (8%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 1.

Principal drug profile

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported (72% of episodes) by people who received assessment only for their own drug use, followed by cannabis (11%) and 'other drugs' (7%).

Counselling

Counselling was the second most common main treatment type reported in the Northern Territory in 2008–09, accounting for 17% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 634 episodes where counselling was nominated as the main treatment type received in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- Most (85%) episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use. The remaining episodes were provided to people seeking counselling related to someone else's drug use.
- Over half (59%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 33 years (31 years for males and 36 years for females).
- 27% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (46% of episodes), followed by court diversion referrals (13%).

Treatment profile

- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (87% of episodes).
- The majority (37%) of episodes ended because the treatment was completed. The next most common reason for episodes to end was that the client ceased to participate without providing notice to the service provider (34% of episodes ended this way).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 72.

Principal drug profile

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported (59% of episodes) by people who received counselling for their own drug use, followed by cannabis (23%).

Withdrawal management (detoxification)

Withdrawal management was the third most common main treatment type reported in the Northern Territory in 2008–09, and accounted for 15% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 574 episodes where withdrawal management was nominated as the main treatment received in 2008–09, the client, drug and treatment profiles were as follows:

Client profile

- Given the nature of the treatment, all episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.
- The majority (52%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 29 years (males 31 years; females 27 years).
- 55% of episodes involved clients who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral 47% of episodes.

Treatment profile

- Treatment was most likely to occur in a residential treatment facility (79% of episodes), followed by non-residential settings (17%).
- Treatment completion was the most common reason for episodes ending (32%). The next most common reason for treatment to end was because the client ceased to participate without notifying the service provider (26% of episodes ended this way).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 8.

Principal drug profile

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported (62% of episodes), followed by cannabis and morphine (both 13%).

Symbols

- nil or rounded to zero
- .. not applicable

How to find out more

If you would like more detailed data about the Northern Territory's alcohol and other treatment services please contact the AIHW to discuss your needs. The document *Alcohol and other drug treatment services NMDS Specifications 2010–11* outlines the process to be followed for unpublished data requests. This document is available from the AIHW website at <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/11461>>

Reference

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2010. Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2008–09: report on the National Minimum Data Set. Drug treatment series no. 10. Cat. no. HSE 92. Canberra: AIHW.

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