

6 Use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes

General use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes

The survey showed that in 1998 little more than one in ten (12%) Australians aged 14 years and over had used pain-killers/analgesics drugs for non-medical purposes in their lifetime (Table 6.1). It also showed that less than half (45%) of these were current users of such drugs for non-medical purposes. Further:

- Higher proportions of younger aged persons reported being lifetime users, with more than twice (14%) those aged 14–19 years reporting life time use compared with those aged 60 years and over (7%).
- Similar patterns were observed among recent users, with more than twice (7%) those aged 14–19 years reporting current use compared with those aged 60 years or older (3%).
- There was very little difference between male and female users in lifetime or recent use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

Table 6.1: Lifetime and recent use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Age	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Males		
14–19	13.4	6.1
20–29	15.9	8.1
30–39	10.5	4.9
40+	9.4	3.9
All ages	11.3	5.2
Females		
14–19	14.8	7.6
20–29	16.0	7.0
30–39	11.7	5.1
40+	9.5	4.0
All ages	11.7	5.1
Persons		
14–19	14.1	6.8
20–29	15.9	7.5
30–39	11.1	5.0
40+	9.5	4.0
All ages	11.5	5.2

Usual place of pain-killers/analgesics consumption

In 1998 persons aged 14 years and over who used pain-killers/analgesics recently for non-medical purposes mostly consumed at home (96%), although nearly one in seven (14%) reported using such drugs at a friend's house (Table 6.2). The third most cited usual place of consumption was a person's workplace, with more than one in ten (12%) recent users reporting using such drugs in the workplace. The survey also showed that there was some sex difference in the use of pain-killers/analgesics, with more males (18%) nominating a friend's place as the usual place of consumption compared with females (11%).

Table 6.2: Where pain-killers/analgesics used for non-medical purposes are usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Place	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
In my own home	97.0	95.2	96.1
Friend's house	17.9	10.9	14.4
Parties	6.6	6.4	6.5
Restaurants/cafes	3.0 *	2.1 *	2.6
Licensed premises	2.0 *	1.8 *	1.9 *
Educational institutions	0.3 *	4.4	2.3
Workplace	17.3	7.2	12.3
Public places	1.4 *	3.2	2.3
Car, other vehicle	2.6 *	1.0 *	1.8 *
Other places	12.7	1.0 *	6.9

Note: Base equals all recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

Frequency of use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes

In 1998, of those Australians aged 14 years and over who recently used pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes:

- A little over one in 12 (8%) took pain-killers/analgesics daily.
- Nearly one-third (29%) used once a month.
- Nearly one in four (23%) used every few months.
- More males (11%) than females (5%) reported using daily.

Table 6.3: Frequency of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Frequency	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Every day	11.1	5.3	8.0
Once a week or more	16.3	17.8	17.1
About once a month	24.8	32.4	28.8
Every few months	24.1	22.1	23.1
Once or twice a year	15.1	9.9	12.3
Less often	8.5	12.5	10.6

Note: Base equals all recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

Sources of supply of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical use

In 1998, of those Australians aged 14 years and over who had ever used pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes, one-third (33%) reported that they obtained their first supply of such drugs from a friend or acquaintance and a further 24% said a parent supplied them (Table 6.4). The survey showed that proportionally more males obtained their first supply from a friend or acquaintance (42%) followed by parent (27%) compared with females (23% and 22% respectively).

Table 6.4: First supplier: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who have ever tried pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes, by sex, Australia, 1998

Supplier	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Friend or acquaintance	42.3	23.4	32.9
Brother or sister	1.1 *	2.2 *	1.7 *
Parent	26.8	21.9	24.3
Spouse or partner	5.5	6.8	6.1
Other relative	0.7 *	—	0.3 *
Street dealer	0.7 *	2.8	1.8 *
Stole it	1.9 *	1.9 *	1.9 *
Other	21.0	40.9	31.0

Note: Base equals users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

In the case of the source of supply for recent use, nearly three-fifths (58%) of recent users aged 14 years and over reported that they obtained their drugs from other sources, whereas one in seven (15%) obtained their supply from a friend or acquaintance (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5: Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Supplier	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Friend or acquaintance	15.6	15.1	15.4
Brother or sister	—	—	—
Parent	18.1	6.9	12.7
Spouse or partner	5.7	6.9	6.3
Other relative	—	—	—
Street dealer	12.8	1.5 *	7.3
Stole it	—	0.4 *	0.2 *
Other	47.7	69.3	58.2

Note: Base equals all recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

Multiple drugs use with pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes

In 1998 nearly nine out of ten (87%) Australians aged 14 years and over who had recently used pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes also used alcohol, and four out of ten used tobacco (39%), marijuana/cannabis (41%) or tranquillisers/sleeping pills (43%) (Table 6.6). The survey also showed that more males than females used alcohol (90% versus 84%), tobacco (42% versus 37%), and marijuana/cannabis (44% versus 39%), while slightly more females (44%) than males (41%) used tranquillisers/sleeping pills.

Table 6.6: Polydrug use: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances recently used	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Alcohol	90.0	84.4	87.2
Tobacco	41.5	36.5	39.0
Marijuana/cannabis	43.9	39.0	41.4
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	41.3	44.3	42.8
Steroids ^(a)	2.4 *	0.5 *	1.5 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	5.3	2.5	3.9
Amphetamines ^(a)	22.8	14.0	18.4
Heroin	10.3	3.5	6.9
Methadone ^(b)	3.9 *	0.7 *	2.3
Cocaine	11.9	3.9	7.8
Hallucinogens	16.2	10.9	13.6
Ecstasy/designer drugs	12.7	7.6	10.1
Inhalants	5.5	5.6	5.6

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) Non-maintenance.

Note: Base equals recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

In the case of concurrent use of multiple drugs, the 1998 survey revealed that, of those persons who were using pain-killers/analgesics, one-third (33%) took alcohol and one-quarter (28%) were using marijuana/cannabis at the same time (Table 6.6). Across sexes it was found that:

- More males (41%) than females (24%) were using alcohol at the same time as pain-killers/analgesics.
- More males tend to use other drugs with pain-killers/analgesics than females: only 48% of males reported not using any other substances concurrently compared with 62% of females.

Table 6.7: Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances concurrently used	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Alcohol	40.7	23.8	32.9
Marijuana/cannabis	32.2	23.5	28.2
Heroin	4.9	1.7 *	3.4
Cocaine	3.7 *	0.7 *	2.3
Benzodiazepines	3.7 *	1.4 *	2.6
Anti-depressants	4.3	6.6	5.4
Barbiturates	2.6 *	1.1 *	1.9 *
None of the above	48.2	62.0	54.6

Note: Base equals all recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.

Correlates of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes

The 1998 survey showed that persons who were unemployed, were never married, were Australian-born, and if employed then worked in blue collar jobs had a higher propensity to use pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes (Table 6.8). The survey showed that:

- There was very little difference in the use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes among people from different socioeconomic areas.
- There was only one percentage point difference in the usage between urban and rural areas, with more people from rural areas (6%) reporting using pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes recently compared with people from urban areas (5%).
- The largest variation in the use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes was found among unemployed and retired persons, with the rate of unemployed persons reporting using such drugs nearly three times (11%) higher compared with retired persons (4%).

Table 6.8: Correlates of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998

Characteristics	Never used	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Education			
No qualification	86.2	13.8	6.4
HSC or equivalent	86.0	14.0	5.0
Trade/diploma	91.7	8.3	3.9
Tertiary	92.5	7.5	3.4
Employment status			
Currently employed	87.9	12.1	5.0
Student	88.8	11.2	5.1
Unemployed	82.2	17.8	11.4
Retired/pension	90.4	9.6	4.2
Occupational status			
Upper (white)	90.5	9.5	4.0
Middle	89.4	10.6	4.7
Lower (blue)	85.3	14.7	6.5
Country of birth			
Australian born	87.9	12.1	5.5
Other English-speaking born	91.7	8.3	3.8
Non-English-speaking born	89.3	10.7	4.1
Socioeconomic area			
1st quintile	88.1	11.9	5.7
2nd quintile	89.1	10.9	5.5
3rd quintile	87.7	12.3	4.2
4th quintile	87.1	12.9	5.1
5th quintile	89.4	10.6	5.1
Geography			
Urban	89.3	10.7	4.8
Rural/remote	86.4	13.6	5.9
Marital status			
Never married	85.0	15.0	7.8
Widowed	92.9	7.1	3.5
Divorced/separated	89.7	10.3	4.5
Presently married	89.8	10.2	4.0