

Statistics on drug use in Australia 2004

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Preface

Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2004 is the eleventh in a series originally titled *Statistics on Drug Abuse in Australia*, which was produced by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. This publication is the fourth produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This edition includes additional material, including more in-depth information on substance use amongst young people, and ecstasy and related drugs use. This publication also intends to act as a summary of major drug-use statistical collections, which leads interested readers to the sources of more detailed information.

This report includes data from the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, findings of which have been published in the AIHW publications *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First Results*, and *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement*. Additional findings will be published in *2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed Findings*, scheduled for release in October 2005.

Summary

Tobacco

Based on the results of the 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), 17% of the Australian population aged 14 years and over were daily smokers. Approximately one in four Australians (26%) were ex-smokers and just over half the population (53%) had never smoked.

Overall, men were more likely than women to be smokers. In 2004, 19% of males were daily smokers, while 16% of females were daily smokers. People aged 20–29 years of age had the highest smoking rates, with 24% of this age group smoking daily.

Smoking rates declined over the period 1991 to 2004.

During the 2003–04 financial year, the Australian Government collected over \$5.6 billion in revenue from the importation and sale of tobacco products in Australia.

Alcohol

In 2004, around 84% of the population aged 14 years and over had consumed at least one full serve of alcohol in the last 12 months. People were most likely to drink either weekly (41%) or less than weekly (34%), and 9% of Australians consumed alcohol on a daily basis. People aged 60 years and over recorded the highest prevalence of daily drinking (17%).

Overall, males were more likely to consume alcohol daily (12%) or weekly (48%) compared with females (6% and 35%).

The pattern of alcohol consumption by the Australian population has remained relatively unchanged over the period 1991 to 2004.

Around one in three people (35%) aged 14 years and over consumed alcohol in a way that put themselves at increased risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term on at least one occasion in the last 12 months. One in ten Australians consumed alcohol at levels that are considered risky or high risk for alcohol-related harm in the long term.

Consistent with the trends in reported consumption, the apparent consumption of alcohol by Australians measured in litres per capita has remained stable during the past decade.

Illicit drugs

Based on responses to the 2004 NDSHS, 38% of Australians aged 14 years and over had used any illicit drug at least once in their lifetime, and 15% had used any illicit drug at least once in the last 12 months.

Marijuana/cannabis was the most common illicit drug used, with one in three persons having used it least once in their lifetime and 11% of the population having used it in the previous 12 months.

Recent illicit drug use was most prevalent among persons aged between 18 and 29 years in 2004, with almost one in three people (31%) in this age bracket having used at least one illicit drug in the last 12 months.

The proportion of the population who had used any illicit drug in the last 12 months fluctuated between 1991 and 2004, reaching a similar level in 2004 (15%) to the prevalence in 1993 (14%). While the proportion of people who had recently used marijuana/cannabis (11%) was the lowest seen in the 13-year period, the proportion using ecstasy (3%) was the highest prevalence for that substance in the same period.

Ecstasy and related drugs were commonly used by 12–24-year-old Australians in 2004. The most prevalent drugs from this group were ecstasy and meth/amphetamines, with 7% of persons in this age group having used each substance in the last 12 months. In particular, the highest recent use of ecstasy (13%) and meth/amphetamines (11%) were reported by 20–24-year-olds.

Pharmaceuticals

Of the 220 million prescription medicines dispensed in 2003, 81% were subsidised by the Australian Government. The two most common prescription medicines distributed through community pharmacies, by cost to the government, and by defined daily dose per 1,000 population, were both medications prescribed for lipid reduction (lowering of blood cholesterol).

In 2004, around 13% of Australians aged 14 years and over had ever used someone else's prescribed or recommended medication when they were feeling unwell.

International comparisons

The decline in smoking rates in Australia over the past three decades has resulted in Australia being ranked lowest of all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in terms of the prevalence of daily smoking.

In 2002, Australia ranked 23rd highest in the world in terms of per capita consumption of alcohol, with approximately 7 litres equivalent of pure alcohol consumed per person. This corresponded to an annual per capita consumption of approximately 92 litres of beer, 21 litres of wine and 1 litre of pure alcohol from spirits.

Drugs and health

According to results from the 2004 NDSHS, smokers were more likely than non-smokers to have experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress and more likely to have been diagnosed with and/or treated for any mental health disorder in the previous 12 months. This was also true for males and females who consumed alcohol at risky and high-risk levels for long-term harm, compared with low-risk drinkers and those who abstained from drinking alcohol.

Compared with those who had not used an illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis, persons who had used any illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis, either at least once in their lifetime or in the last 12 months, were approximately twice as likely to have been

diagnosed with and/or treated for a mental health disorder. For example, 17% of persons who had used an illicit drug other than marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months had been diagnosed and/or treated for a mental health disorder, compared with 9% of non-users.

According to the annual Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) Survey, hepatitis C prevalence among people attending needle and syringe programs remained high over the period 1997 to 2003, with 57% of males and 61% of females testing positive to the hepatitis C virus antibody in 2003.

The death rate from accidental opioid overdose among people aged 15–54 years increased during the late 1990s, peaking at 101.9 deaths per million persons in 1999, before declining sharply to 34.6 deaths per million persons in 2001. Since 2001 the death rate from accidental opioid overdose has declined slightly, to 31.5 deaths per million persons in 2003.

Special population groups

Young people aged 12–19 years

Results from the 2004 NDSHS indicate that the prevalence of smoking increased rapidly with age among young people aged 12–19 years. An estimated one in five people aged 18–19 years were smokers in 2004, with approximately 17% smoking on a daily basis, compared with approximately 2% of 12–15-year-olds.

Based on results from a nationally representative study, smoking prevalence declined amongst secondary students aged 12–17 years between 1999 and 2002. The use of various illicit drugs by this population group either declined or remained stable during this time, and the prevalence of alcohol consumption by secondary students remained stable.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

In 2004, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who consumed alcohol in the last 12 months (71%) was lower than the proportion for other Australians (82%). However, compared with other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were more likely to have smoked and/or used illicit drugs in the last 12 months. For example, 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had used marijuana/cannabis in the last 12 months compared with 11% of other Australians.

Pregnant and/or breastfeeding women

The 2004 NDSHS found that women who were pregnant and/or breastfeeding in the previous 12 months were less likely to consume alcohol (47%) and any illicit drug (6%), compared with when they weren't (85% and 17% respectively). Pregnant and/or breastfeeding women appeared less likely to reduce their tobacco consumption, with 22% smoking when they weren't pregnant and/or breastfeeding, and 20% continuing to smoke during pregnancy and/or while breastfeeding.

Other selected population groups

Compared with people of higher socioeconomic status (SES), people of lower SES were more likely to be daily smokers, with almost one-quarter (24%) of people in the lowest quintile and around one in ten (11%) people in the highest quintile smoking daily in 2004. However, people of lower SES seemed less likely to consume alcohol at risky and high-risk levels for harm in the short term, and less likely to have recently used marijuana/cannabis and/or amphetamine-type substances compared with people of higher SES.

Treatment services

In the 2002–03 Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS–NMDS) collection, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in treatment episodes (38%), followed by marijuana/cannabis (22%), heroin (18%) and meth/amphetamines (11%). The proportion of treatment episodes where alcohol was the principal drug of concern increased with age, while the proportion of episodes where marijuana/cannabis was the principal drug of concern decreased with age.

Treatment episodes for clients aged 20–29 years were the most diverse in terms of drug type, with roughly similar proportions of episodes for alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, heroin and meth/amphetamines.

In 2002–03, around one-quarter (26%) of treatment episodes involved clients who identified themselves as current injectors.

Excluding clients in South Australia, there were around 25,900 methadone maintenance therapy clients and around 8,600 buprenorphine maintenance therapy clients in Australia at 30 June 2003.

Crime and law enforcement

Marijuana/cannabis accounted for 72% of illicit drug arrests in 2003–04, compared with 12% of arrests related to amphetamine-type stimulants.

In 2004, one in ten sentenced prisoners was imprisoned for drug-related offences. The most common drug-related offence for which people were imprisoned was dealing/trafficking drugs.

Results based on the 2003 Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) study show that two-thirds of female sentenced prisoners used an illicit drug in the 6 months prior to their arrest, while around 27% were classified in the study as dependent on alcohol and 55% were classified as dependent on drugs. Around two-thirds of female prisoners responding to the 2003 DUCO survey who were classified in the study as alcohol and/or drug dependent reported that they ‘often’ experienced a mental health condition while growing up.

Polydrug use

Polydrug use is defined as ‘the use of more than one drug, simultaneously or at different times’ (MCDS 2004:24). According to the 2004 NDSHS, substance users were more likely than non-users to use other drugs. For example, there was a more than fourfold greater use

of marijuana/cannabis and more than threefold greater use of any illicit drug among tobacco smokers compared with non-smokers. Similar results were observed when users of alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, amphetamine-type substances and heroin were compared with non-users.

In their surveys of user populations, the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre found that polydrug use is common among ecstasy users and injecting drug users who use heroin.

Drug avoidance and moderation

In 2004, approximately 5% of male smokers and 7% of female smokers had participated in anti-smoking programs in the last 12 months. While 40% of smokers unsuccessfully tried to give up smoking, 23% successfully quit for more than one month. Less than 1% of recent drinkers had participated in an alcohol treatment program in the last 12 months.

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Abbreviations

| | |
|------------|---|
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| ACC | Australian Crime Commission |
| AIC | Australian Institute of Criminology |
| AIHW | Australian Institute of Health and Welfare |
| AODTS-NMDS | Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set |
| ASSADS | Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug Survey |
| ATC | Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical |
| ATO | Australian Taxation Office |
| ATS | Amphetamine-type substance(s) |
| DUCO | Drug Use Careers of Offenders |
| DUMA | Drug Use Monitoring in Australia |
| ERDs | Ecstasy and related drugs |
| GHB | Gamma-hydroxybutyrate |
| IDRS | Illicit Drug Reporting System |
| MCDS | Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy |
| MDA | 3,4 methylenedioxyamphetamine |
| MDMA | 3,4 methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (ecstasy) |
| NATSISS | National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey |
| NCHECR | National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research |
| NDARC | National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre |
| NDRI | National Drug Research Institute |
| NDS | National Drug Strategy |
| NDSHS | National Drug Strategy Household Survey |
| NSP | Needle and Syringe Program |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PDI | Party Drugs Initiative |
| PBS | Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme |
| RPBS | Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme |
| SAAP | Supported Accommodation Assistance Program |
| SEIFA | Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas |
| SES | Socioeconomic status |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |

Symbols

| | |
|-------|---|
| n.a. | Not available |
| n.y.a | Not yet available |
| – | Nil, or rounded to zero |
| .. | Not applicable |
| * | Result unreliable as the relative standard error was greater than 50% |
| kg | Kilogram(s) |
| m | Million |