



# Alcohol and other drug treatment services in New South Wales

*Findings from the National Minimum Data Set (NMDS)  
2006–07*

## Highlights

In New South Wales (NSW) in 2006–07:

- 262 government-funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies and outlets provided 37,945 closed treatment episodes.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment for their own drug use was 34 years. Of people seeking treatment in relation to someone else's drug use, the median age was 45 years.
- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in closed treatment episodes (45%), followed by cannabis (19%), amphetamines (13%) and heroin (13%).
- Counselling was the most common form of main treatment provided (32% of episodes), followed by withdrawal management (detoxification) (21%) and assessment only (19%).

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### **About this bulletin**

This bulletin summarises the main findings from the 2006–07 Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services (AODTS) NMDS data for NSW. More detailed information about the 2006–07 collection and its findings can be found in the publication *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2006–07: report on the National Minimum Data Set* (AIHW 2008). This report, together with further publications and interactive data, can be accessed online at <[www.aihw.gov.au/drugs](http://www.aihw.gov.au/drugs)>.

### **Scope of the AODTS–NMDS**

The agencies and clients that were in scope for the 2006–07 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 2006 to 30 June 2007.

It is important to note that the AODTS–NMDS collection only includes pharmacotherapy clients 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 1.3 of the AODTS–NMDS 2006–07 annual report (AIHW 2008).

### **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, 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 633 government-funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies supplied data for 2006–07. Of these agencies, 262 outlets were located in NSW, of which 194 were government agencies and 68 were non-government agencies.
- Treatment agencies in NSW were most likely to be located in Major Cities (60%), followed by Inner Regional (32%) and Outer Regional areas (8%).

## Client profile

- In NSW there were 37,945 closed treatment episodes in alcohol and other drug treatment services reported in the 2006–07 AODTS–NMDS collection.
- The vast majority (97%) of closed treatment episodes in NSW involved clients seeking treatment for their own drug use. The remaining 3% involved clients seeking treatment in relation to another person's alcohol or other drug use.
- The overall proportions of male and female clients in NSW were the same as the national proportions (66% and 34% respectively). However, of those treatment episodes reported in relation to someone else's drug use in NSW, female clients accounted for the majority (76%) of episodes.
- In NSW, the median age of persons receiving treatment for their own drug use was 33 years. Of people seeking treatment in relation to someone else's drug use, the median age was 47 years.
- Almost one-third (32%) of closed treatment episodes in NSW were for clients aged 30–39 years, while 31% were for clients aged 20–29 years.
- The proportion of closed treatment episodes involving clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin in NSW matched the national figure (both 10%), and is higher than the overall proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, aged 10 years and over, in the Australian population (2.5%) (ABS&AIHW 2008). These figures need to be interpreted with caution due to the fact that the majority of Australian Government-funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander substance use services and primary health care services are not included in the AODTS–NMDS collection.
- The majority (88%) of closed treatment episodes in NSW were for clients born in Australia and 98% of treatment episodes were for clients whose preferred language was English.
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral to treatment services in NSW (38% of episodes) followed by referrals from alcohol and other drug treatment services (15%).

## Drugs of concern

This section reports on the 36,967 treatment episodes where clients were seeking treatment for their own alcohol or other drug use in NSW.

### Principal drug of concern

The principal drug of concern refers to the main substance that the client states led them to seek treatment from an alcohol and drug treatment agency.

- In NSW in 2006–07, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in closed treatment episodes (45%), followed by cannabis (19%), amphetamines (13%) and heroin (13%) (Table 1). The national patterns were similar to NSW with alcohol also the most common principal drug of concern (42% of treatment episodes), followed by cannabis (23%), opioids (14%, with heroin accounting for 11%) and amphetamines (12%).
- The proportion of treatment episodes for each drug type has been reasonably stable over time in NSW. Cannabis appears to be accounting for more treatments over time, albeit with a small reduction in 2006–07. Heroin has also dropped between 2005–06 and 2006–07.

**Table 1: Closed treatment episodes<sup>(a)</sup> by principal drug of concern, NSW and Australia, 2001–02 to 2006–07 (per cent)**

Principal drug of concern	New South Wales						Total (Australia) 2006–07	
	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07 <sup>(b)</sup>	Per cent	Number
Alcohol	42.7	42.1	41.2	41.5	43.0	45.0	42.3	59,480
Amphetamines	10.7	10.9	10.9	11.3	11.2	13.3	12.3	17,292
Benzodiazepines	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.2	2.0	1.6	2,298
Cannabis	14.3	15.4	16.1	17.4	20.2	19.0	22.8	31,980
Cocaine	1.8	0.5	0.4	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.3	448
Ecstasy	—	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.7	1,010
Nicotine	1.9	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.2	0.7	1.7	2,450
Opioids								
Heroin	18.7	21.4	21.4	20.1	15.6	13.0	10.6	14,870
Methadone	3.4	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.2	2.0	1.6	2,268
Morphine	—	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.8	1.1	0.9	1,299
Total opioids <sup>(c)</sup>	23.7	25.4	25.5	24.5	20.2	17.8	14.4	20,196
All other drugs <sup>(d)</sup>	2.2	0.5	0.4	1.1	1.0	1.1	3.8	5,321
Not stated	—	1.3	1.4	—	—	—	—	—
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>..</b>
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>38,111</b>	<b>40,002</b>	<b>41,426</b>	<b>41,789</b>	<b>42,589</b>	<b>36,967</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>140,475</b>

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

(b) New South Wales encountered collection system issues that affected a number of Area Health Services, which in turn caused a reduction in the total collection for this year.

(c) Total includes balance of opioids.

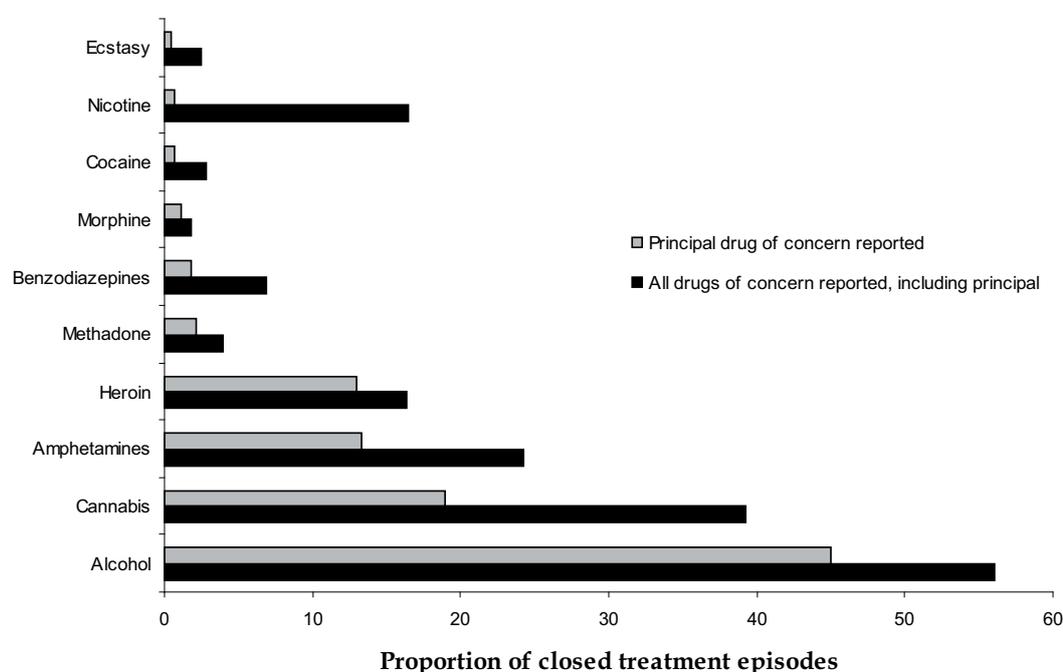
(d) Includes balance of principal drugs of concern coded according to the Australian Standard Classification of Drugs of Concern.

- The principal drug of concern nominated by clients varied by age in NSW:
  - For clients aged 10–19 years, cannabis was the most common principal drug of concern (43% of episodes).
  - For clients aged 20–29 years, the principal drugs of concern were more evenly distributed with alcohol being the most commonly nominated drug (30% of episodes), followed closely by cannabis (26%) and amphetamines (18%).
  - For clients aged 30 years and over, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern—highest for clients 60 years and over (88% of episodes).

### 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).

- Over half (54%) of all treatment episodes in NSW involved at least one other drug of concern in addition to the principal drug.
- A breakdown of all drugs of concern by drug type is presented below (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 17% of treatment episodes.



**Figure 1: Closed treatment episodes by principal drug of concern and all drugs of concern, NSW, 2006–07**

## Alcohol

In NSW, alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 45% of closed treatment episodes in 2006–07. When all drugs of concern are considered (that is, the principal drug and all other drugs of concern nominated by the client), 56% of episodes included alcohol.

Of the 16,623 episodes where alcohol was nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2006–07:

### *Client profile*

- The majority (70%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 38 years (males 37 years; females 39 years).
- Around 10% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (for 3% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (40% of episodes), followed by referrals from alcohol and other drug treatment services (16%).

### *Drug profile*

- 45% of episodes included at least one other drug of concern. In these episodes, 38% of other drugs were cannabis, 30% nicotine, and 14% amphetamines.
- The majority (72%) of episodes involved clients who reported never having injected drugs. Around 7% of episodes involved clients who reported being current injectors, while 14% involved clients who reported they had injected drugs in the past. Caution should be taken, however, when interpreting data for 'injecting drug use' due to the 'not stated' responses for this item (7% of episodes).

### *Treatment profile*

- Counselling was the most common main treatment type received (36% of episodes), followed by withdrawal management (detoxification) (24%) and assessment only (19%).
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (68% of episodes), followed by a residential treatment facility (26%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 8.

## Cannabis

In NSW, cannabis was the second most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 19% of closed treatment episodes in 2006–07. When all drugs of concern are considered (that is, the principal drug of concern and all other drugs of concern nominated by the client), 39% of episodes included cannabis.

Of the 7,072 episodes where cannabis was nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2006–07:

### *Client profile*

- The majority (70%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 28 years (males 27 years; females 28 years).
- Around 12% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (for 5% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (32% of episodes), followed by referrals from court diversion programs designed to direct people charged with drug related offences into treatment (16%).

### *Drug profile*

- Smoking was the most common usual method of use (almost 100% of episodes).
- 57% of episodes included at least one other drug of concern—35% were for alcohol, 24% amphetamines and 22% nicotine.
- Around 61% of all episodes involved clients who reported never having injected drugs. A further 12% of episodes involved clients who reported being current injectors, while 19% involved clients who reported they had injected drugs in the past. Caution should be taken, however, when interpreting data for 'injecting drug use' due to the 'not stated' responses for this item (7% of episodes).

### *Treatment profile*

- Counselling was the most common main treatment type received (34% of episodes), followed by assessment only (21%) and withdrawal management (detoxification) (17%).
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (78% of episodes), followed by a residential treatment setting (17%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 16.

## **Amphetamines**

In NSW, amphetamines were the third most common principal drug of concern for which treatment was sought, accounting for 13% of closed treatment episodes in 2006–07. When all drugs of concern are considered (that is, the principal drug of concern and all other drugs of concern nominated by the client), 24% of episodes included amphetamines.

Of the 4,911 episodes where amphetamines were nominated as the principal drug of concern in 2006–07:

### *Client profile*

- The majority (67%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 30 years (males 30 years; females 28 years).

- About 11% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (for 2% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (35% of episodes), followed by referrals from court diversion programs (16%).

#### *Drug profile*

- Injecting was the most common method of use (71% of episodes), followed by smoking (14%) and ingesting (11%).
- 3,495 episodes (71%) included at least one other drug of concern—39% were for cannabis, 22% for alcohol and 10% nicotine.
- Two thirds (66%) of episodes involved clients who reported being current injectors, while 12% involved clients who had injected drugs in the past (7% between 3 and 12 months ago and 5% 12 or more months ago).

#### *Treatment profile*

- Counselling was the most common main treatment type received (24% of episodes), followed by assessment only (21%) and withdrawal management (20%).
- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment facility (64% of episodes), followed by a residential treatment facility (31%).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 13.

## **Treatment programs**

‘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 section on ‘principal drug of concern’, which does not apply to clients seeking treatment in relation to someone else’s drug use).

- Of all closed treatment episodes in NSW, counselling was the most common form of main treatment provided (32% of episodes), followed by withdrawal management (21%) and assessment only (19%) (Table 2). Nationally, the same three treatment types accounted for the most common treatments—counselling was most common (39% of episodes), followed by withdrawal management (detoxification) (17%) and assessment only (15%).
- The proportion of treatment episodes involving each treatment type has been reasonably stable over time in NSW. There was little change between 2005–06 and 2006–07.

**Table 2: Closed treatment episodes by main treatment type, NSW and Australia, 2001–02 to 2006–07 (per cent)**

Main treatment type	New South Wales						Total (Australia) 2006–07	
	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05	2005–06	2006–07 <sup>(a)</sup>	Per cent	Number
Withdrawal management (detoxification)	21.0	22.6	23.3	22.2	20.9	21.0	16.6	24,467
Counselling	27.1	37.9	28.9	34.3	32.5	32.0	38.7	57,017
Rehabilitation	8.9	9.0	10.0	10.4	10.2	9.7	7.4	10,950
Support & case management only	1.9	6.0	8.3	8.4	9.8	9.7	8.3	12,290
Information and education only	13.0	2.8	2.0	2.3	1.6	1.6	9.3	13,723
Assessment only	23.0	17.3	22.3	16.0	20.6	19.0	15.1	22,295
Other <sup>(b)</sup>	5.1	4.4	5.1	6.4	4.4	7.0	4.5	6,583
<b>Total (per cent)</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>..</b>
<b>Total (number)</b>	<b>39,348</b>	<b>41,166</b>	<b>42,529</b>	<b>43,079</b>	<b>43,798</b>	<b>37,945</b>	<b>..</b>	<b>147,325</b>

(a) New South Wales encountered collection system issues that affected a number of Area Health Services, which in turn caused a reduction in the total collection for this year.

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

## Counselling

Counselling was the most common main treatment type reported in NSW in 2006–07, accounting for 32% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 12,018 episodes where counselling was nominated as the main treatment type received:

### Client profile

- The vast majority (94%) of episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.
- Over half (64%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 34 years (males 33 years; females 36 years).
- Around 8% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (for 4% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (42% of episodes), followed by referrals from alcohol and other drug treatment services (13%).

### Treatment profile

- The majority (94%) of episodes occurred in a non-residential treatment facility.
- Approximately half of episodes (52%) ended because the treatment was completed. The next most common reason for episodes to end was that the client ceased to participate without notifying the service provider (32% of episodes ended this way).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 42.

#### *Principal drug profile*

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported (53% of episodes) by people seeking counselling for their own drug use, followed by cannabis (21%) and amphetamines (10%).

#### **Withdrawal management (detoxification)**

Withdrawal management (detoxification) was the second most common main treatment type reported in NSW in 2006–07, accounting for almost 21% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 7,945 episodes where withdrawal management was nominated as the main treatment received in 2006–07:

#### *Client profile*

- All episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.
- The majority (67%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 36 years (males 36 years; females 35 years).
- Around 8% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (for 3% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (54% of episodes), followed by referrals from alcohol and other drug services (14%).

#### *Treatment profile*

- Treatment was most likely to take place in a residential treatment facility (79% of episodes), followed by a non-residential treatment facility (18%).
- The majority (67%) of episodes ended because the treatment was completed. The next most common reason for ending a treatment episode was that the client ceased to participate without notice (16% of episodes ended this way).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 6.

#### *Principal drug profile*

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported (44% of episodes), followed by cannabis (24%) and heroin (10%).

#### **Assessment only**

The third most common main treatment provided in NSW in 2006–07 was assessment only, accounting for 19% of closed treatment episodes. Of the 7,326 episodes where assessment only was nominated as the main treatment type received in 2006–07:

#### *Client profile*

- Almost all (99%) of episodes were for clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.

- The majority (71%) of episodes were for male clients.
- The median age of persons receiving treatment was 32 years (males 31 years; females 33 years).
- Around 15% of episodes involved clients who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (for 3% of episodes, Indigenous status was not reported).
- Self-referral was the most common source of referral (28% of episodes), followed by referrals from alcohol and other drug treatment services (17%).

#### *Treatment profile*

- Treatment was most likely to occur in a non-residential treatment setting (92% of episodes), followed by an 'other' treatment setting (6%).
- The majority (97%) of episodes ended because the treatment was completed. The next most common reason for ending a treatment episode was the client ceased to participate without notice (2% of episodes ended this way).
- The median number of days for a treatment episode was 1.

#### *Principal drug profile*

- Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern reported by people who received assessment only for their own drug use (43% of episodes), followed by cannabis (20%) and amphetamines (14%).

## **How to find out more**

If you would like more detailed data about NSW's alcohol and other treatment services please contact the AIHW to discuss your needs. The document *Alcohol and other drug treatment services NMDS Specifications 2008–09* outlines the process to be followed for unpublished data requests. This document is available from the AIHW website at <[www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10575](http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10575)>.

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