

# **2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

**First results**

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Number 9

# **2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

**First results**

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Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
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# Foreword

This report presents the summary results from the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey and is the ninth report in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Drug Statistics Series. The main survey report – subtitled *Detailed Findings* – will be published later in the year.

The AIHW managed the survey on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The survey project was approved by both the AIHW Health Ethics Committee and the [then] Department of Health and Aged Care's Ethics Committee. For the first time, the survey was fully 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 data set is available through the 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 contribute to 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 Pramod Adhikari for his role in managing the survey, to Jacki Grau and Cid Mateo for authoring this report, and the Department's officers who worked closely with the AIHW team in all phases of the survey.

The participation of almost 27,000 Australians in a survey which invited admissions of possibly illegal activities is very much appreciated.

Richard Madden  
Director  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
May 2002



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# Summary

## The 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey was conducted between July and October 2001. This was the seventh and largest survey in a series which commenced in 1985, and it was the second to be managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Almost 27,000 Australians aged 14 years and older participated in the survey, in which they were asked about their knowledge and attitudes towards drugs, their drug consumption histories, and related behaviours.

### Tobacco

Tobacco was primarily associated with a drug 'problem' by 2.7% of Australians aged 14 years and over and 39.7% 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 were offered or had the opportunity to use tobacco in the last 12 months.

One-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 fewer than one in four had smoked in the last 12 months. The proportion of the population who smoked daily declined by two percentage points between 1998 and 2001, to 19.5%. However, the average age at which smokers took up tobacco remained stable at 15 years.

### Alcohol

Alcohol was associated with a drug 'problem' by 7.8% of Australians aged 14 years and over, whereas 74.4% 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.

Nine out of every 10 Australians had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and four in five had consumed alcohol in the 12 months preceding the 2001 survey.

The proportion of the population drinking daily remained stable (8.3%) between 1998 and 2001 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 30%) also remained stable.

One in eight people admitted to driving a motor vehicle and one in 16 verbally abused someone while under the influence of alcohol. More than one-quarter of Australians aged 14 years and over had been verbally abused and 4.9% had been physically abused by someone under the influence of alcohol.

## **Illicit drugs**

More than nine in every 10 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 four accepted the regular use of marijuana by adults. Almost two in every five Australians had used an illicit drug at some time in their lives and almost one in six had used illicit drugs in the previous 12 months.

The average age at which new users first tried illicit drugs remained stable at 19 years of age. The most accessible illicit drugs were painkillers/analgesics and marijuana/cannabis – 38.4% and 21.0% 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 3.9% of Australians aged 14 years or over. More than one in 10 persons were verbally abused and one in 50 were physically abused by someone affected by illicit drugs.

# Acknowledgments

The 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey was a complex project which required the time and input of many individuals and organisations. The assistance of the following is particularly appreciated.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Policy Reference Group and the Survey Technical Advisory Committee (refer to Appendix 1) were the main steering committees.

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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
DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing
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
#	2001 result significantly different from 1998 result (2-tailed $\alpha = 0.05$ )
n.a.	not available
m	million