

# **Statistics on drug use in Australia 2002**

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# **Statistics on drug use in Australia 2002**

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# Preface

*Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 2002* is the tenth in a series originally titled *Statistics on Drug Abuse in Australia*, which was produced by the then Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. This publication is the third produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and follows a similar format to earlier titles. This edition includes additional material which is intended to broaden the scope of the publication, including information on male detainees held in police watch-houses and male prisoners participating in the Drug Use Careers of Offenders survey. There is also a new section on marijuana/cannabis use in the chapter on illicit drug use. This publication is intended as an accessible summary of major drug-use statistical collections, which leads interested readers to the sources of more detailed information.

This report includes data from the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, findings of which have been published in the following AIHW publications:

- *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First Results*
- *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: State and Territory Supplement*
- *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed Findings.*

# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>List of tables</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of figures</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>xiv</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>xvii</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>xviii</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
National Drug Strategy .....	1
The National Drug Strategic Framework 1998-99 to 2003-04.....	1
Background.....	1
About this report .....	2
Data sources .....	2
<b>2 Tobacco</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Introduction.....	3
Apparent consumption trends.....	3
Reported consumption trends .....	5
Consumption by age and sex.....	8
Government revenue .....	9
<b>3 Alcohol</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Introduction.....	10
Apparent consumption trends.....	10
Reported consumption trends .....	11
Consumption by age and sex.....	12
Risk of alcohol-related harm in the long term.....	13
Risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term.....	14
Government revenue .....	15
<b>4 Illicit drug use</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Introduction.....	16
Measures of illicit drug use .....	16

	National trends .....	19
	Marijuana/cannabis use .....	20
<b>5</b>	<b>Pharmaceutical products .....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Introduction.....	23
	Top 10 prescription medicines.....	23
	Community prescriptions for major drug groups .....	25
	Drugs affecting the central nervous system.....	26
<b>6</b>	<b>International comparisons .....</b>	<b>27</b>
	Introduction.....	27
	Tobacco.....	27
	Alcohol .....	29
	Illicit drugs.....	32
<b>7</b>	<b>Drugs and health .....</b>	<b>33</b>
	Introduction.....	33
	Mortality and morbidity .....	33
	Injecting drug use and communicable disease.....	37
	Overdoses .....	41
	Fatal road accidents related to alcohol use .....	43
<b>8</b>	<b>Special population groups .....</b>	<b>44</b>
	Introduction.....	44
	Young people .....	45
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples .....	47
	People living in rural and remote areas .....	52
	Persons of a non-English-speaking background.....	53
	Older people.....	54
	Pregnant or breastfeeding women .....	55
	Homeless people.....	56
	Injecting drug users .....	58
<b>9</b>	<b>Treatment services.....</b>	<b>60</b>
	Introduction.....	60
	Alcohol and other drug treatment services .....	60
	Clients of treatment service agencies.....	63
	Substance use services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.....	69

<b>10</b>	<b>Crime and law enforcement</b> .....	<b>70</b>
	Introduction.....	70
	Illicit drug offences.....	70
	Drug use and criminal offending .....	74
	Illicit drug detections .....	80
<b>11</b>	<b>Polydrug use</b> .....	<b>84</b>
	Introduction.....	84
	Polydrug use and tobacco .....	84
	Polydrug use and alcohol.....	85
	Polydrug use and marijuana/cannabis.....	86
	Polydrug use and amphetamine-type substances .....	87
<b>12</b>	<b>Drug avoidance and moderation</b> .....	<b>88</b>
	Introduction.....	88
	Avoidance of cigarette smoke.....	88
	Smoking moderation behaviours .....	89
	Alcohol reduction behaviours .....	90
	Alcohol moderation behaviours .....	91
	Participation in drug treatment programs .....	92
	<b>Appendix A: Confidence intervals</b> .....	<b>93</b>
	<b>References and further reading</b> .....	<b>94</b>

# List of tables

Table 2.1:	Volume of tobacco cleared through excise and customs, Australia, 1995–96 to 1998–99.....	4
Table 2.2:	Volume of tobacco cleared through excise and customs, Australia, 1999–00 to 2001–02.....	4
Table 2.3:	Tobacco smoking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, males, Australia, 1991 to 2001 .....	5
Table 2.4:	Tobacco smoking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, females, Australia, 1991 to 2001 .....	6
Table 2.5:	Tobacco smoking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	8
Table 2.6:	Government revenue from excise, customs clearances, and State business franchise fees related to the sale of tobacco, Australia, 1995–96 to 2001–02.....	9
Table 3.1:	Alcohol drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1991 to 2001 .....	11
Table 3.2:	Alcohol drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	12
Table 3.3:	Risk of harm in the long term: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	13
Table 3.4:	Risk of harm in the short term: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	14
Table 3.5:	Government revenue from duty paid and State business franchise fees related to the sale of alcohol, Australia, 1995–96 to 2001–02 .....	15
Table 4.1:	Summary of illicit drug use in Australia, 2001 .....	17
Table 4.2:	Summary of recent illicit drug use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by drug type, Australia, 1991 to 2001 .....	19
Table 4.3:	Use of marijuana/cannabis: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	20
Table 4.4:	Frequency of marijuana/cannabis use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	21
Table 4.5:	Support for personal use of marijuana/cannabis being made legal: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	22
Table 5.1:	Top 10 prescription medicines distributed through community pharmacies, Australia, 2001 .....	23
Table 5.2:	Top 10 prescription drugs by cost to the Commonwealth Government (PBS and RPBS), Australia, 2001 .....	24
Table 5.3:	Top 10 prescription medicines issued through community pharmacies by defined daily dose, Australia, 2001 .....	25

Table 5.4:	Number of community prescriptions issued for selected Anatomical Therapeutic Chemical groups, Australia, 1999–2001.....	25
Table 5.5:	Community prescriptions for nervous system drugs, Australia, 1999 to 2001 .....	26
Table 6.1:	Prevalence of daily smoking, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1971 to 2001 .....	28
Table 6.2:	Tobacco consumption, grams per capita, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1971 to 2001 .....	29
Table 6.3:	Alcohol consumption, litres per capita, selected countries, 2000 .....	30
Table 6.4:	Alcohol consumption, litres of pure alcohol per capita, population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 1961 to 2001 .....	31
Table 6.5:	Summary of drug use in the past 12 months: proportion of the population aged 15 years and over, selected countries, 2000–2001 .....	32
Table 7.1:	Deaths attributable to drug use, by drug involved and cause of death, Australia, 1998.....	35
Table 7.2:	Hospital episodes attributable to drug use, by drug involved and principal diagnosis, Australia, 1997–98.....	36
Table 7.3:	Number of AIDS diagnoses, by HIV exposure category, Australia, 1993 to 2001 .....	37
Table 7.4:	Number of deaths following AIDS, by HIV exposure category, Australia, 1993 to 2001.....	38
Table 7.5:	Reported use of a needle and syringe after someone else in the last month: proportion of injecting drug users, by sex and history of injecting drug use, Australia, 1997 to 2001 .....	40
Table 7.6:	Proportion of injecting drug users reporting non-fatal heroin overdose, selected risk behaviours and protective factors for overdose, Australia, 2001 .....	41
Table 8.1:	Tobacco smoking status and risk of alcohol-related harm: proportion of the population aged 14–17 years, by age, Australia, 2001.....	45
Table 8.2:	Summary of lifetime use of illicit drugs, persons aged 14–17 years, Australia, 2001.....	46
Table 8.3:	Summary of recent illicit drug use, persons aged 14–17 years, Australia, 2001 .....	47
Table 8.4:	Summary of drug use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous persons aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001 .....	48
Table 8.5:	Tobacco smoking status: proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous persons aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	49
Table 8.6:	Risk of harm in the long term: proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous persons aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	50

Table 8.7:	Risk of harm in the short term: proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous persons aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	51
Table 8.8:	Summary of drug use by people living inside and outside Australian major cities: population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001 .....	52
Table 8.9:	Summary of drug use in people from an English- and a non-English-speaking background, Australia, 2001 .....	53
Table 8.10:	Summary of drug use in younger and older persons aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001 .....	54
Table 8.11:	Drug use in the past 12 months by pregnant and/or breastfeeding women and all other women, women aged 14–49 years, Australia, 2001 .....	55
Table 8.12:	Change in alcohol consumption among women who were pregnant or who were breastfeeding in the last 12 months, aged 14 years and over, Australia, 2001 .....	55
Table 8.13:	Demographic characteristics of injecting drug users, by jurisdiction, Australia, 2001 .....	58
Table 8.14:	Proportion of injecting drug users who had shared needles or other injecting equipment, by jurisdiction, Australia, 2000 and 2001 .....	59
Table 9.1:	Services provided by alcohol and drug treatment service agencies: proportion of clients by service type, by State and Territory, Australia, 2001.....	63
Table 9.2:	Methadone clients by State and Territory, Australia, 2001 .....	64
Table 9.3:	Principal drug problems of clients of treatment service agencies, by type of client, Australia, 2001 .....	65
Table 9.4:	Principal drug problems of clients of treatment service agencies, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	66
Table 9.5:	Principal drug problems of clients of treatment service agencies, by age group, Australia, 2001 .....	67
Table 9.6:	Principal drug problems of clients of treatment service agencies, Australia, 1990 to 2001 .....	68
Table 10.1:	Illicit drug arrests, by type of drug and proportion that are related to the consumption of drugs, Australia, 1995–96 to 2000–01 .....	71
Table 10.2:	Sentenced prisoners where the most serious offence was drug-related, by type of offence, by State and Territory, Australia, 1995 to 2001 .....	73
Table 10.3:	Marijuana/cannabis arrests and offence notices issued per 100,000 population, by State and Territory, 1995–96 to 2001–02 .....	74
Table 10.4:	Self-reported crime among injecting drug users and proportion arrested in the last year, by type of crime, Australia, 2001 .....	74
Table 10.5:	Proportion of male detainees testing positive to illicit drugs in the last 12 months, by age and type of illicit drug, Australia, 2001 .....	75
Table 10.6:	Proportion of male detainees defining themselves as drug dependent, by age and type of illicit drug, Australia, 2001 .....	75

Table 10.7:	Proportion of male prisoners who used illicit drugs in the 6 months before arrest, by age and type of illicit drug, Australia, 2001.....	76
Table 10.8:	Proportion of male prisoners who self-reported drug dependency, by age and type of illicit drug, Australia, 2001 .....	77
Table 10.9:	Proportion of male prisoners who self-reported drug dependency, by age and type of offence, Australia, 2001 .....	77
Table 10.10:	Proportion of male prisoners who self-reported being under the influence of alcohol or illicit drugs at the time of offence, by age, type of offence and type of drug used at the time of offence, Australia, 2001.....	78
Table 10.11:	Proportion of male prisoners who used alcohol and/or illicit drugs at the time of offence, by age and type of offence, Australia, 2001 .....	79
Table 10.12:	Average purity of heroin seizures analysed in Australia, selected jurisdictions, 1996-97 to 2000-01 .....	80
Table 11.1:	Recent use of other drugs by smokers and non-smokers: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001.....	84
Table 11.2:	Recent use of other drugs by drinkers and non-drinkers: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001.....	85
Table 11.3:	Recent use of other drugs by users and non-users of marijuana/cannabis: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	86
Table 11.4:	Recent use of other drugs by users and non-users of amphetamine-type substances: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001.....	87
Table 12.1:	Non-smokers' avoidance of places where they might be exposed to other people's cigarette smoke: proportion of non-smokers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	88
Table 12.2:	Attempted change in smoking behaviour: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	89
Table 12.3:	Alcohol reduction behaviours: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by risk classification and sex, Australia, 2001 .....	90
Table 12.4:	Alcohol moderation behaviours: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by risk classification and sex, Australia, 2001.....	91
Table 12.5:	Participation in alcohol and other drug treatment programs: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 2001 .....	92

# List of figures

Figure 2.1: Tobacco smoking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1991 to 2001 .....	7
Figure 3.1: Indices of alcohol consumption, Australia, 1964–65 to 1999–00 .....	10
Figure 4.1: Prevalence and 95% confidence intervals of drug use in the last 12 months, selected illicit drugs, persons aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 2001 .....	18
Figure 7.1: HIV and hepatitis C prevalence among people attending needle and syringe programs, by sex, Australia, 1997 to 2001 .....	39
Figure 7.2: Opioid overdose deaths: rate per million population aged 15–44 years, Australia, 1988 to 2001 .....	42
Figure 7.3: Fatally injured drivers and motorcycle riders, and proportion of fatally injured drivers/riders whose blood alcohol reading was higher than 0.05 g/100 mL, Australia, 1981 to 2000.....	43
Figure 8.1: Proportion of SAAP support periods where reason for seeking assistance and/or support to the client was for substance use, by age and sex, Australia, 2001–02.....	56
Figure 8.2: Proportion of SAAP support periods where reason for seeking assistance and/or support to the client was for substance use, by sex, Australia, 1998–99 to 2001–02.....	57
Figure 9.1: Substance users: selected principal drug of concern, by age, Australia, 2000–01 .....	61
Figure 9.2: Substance users: injecting drug use, by age, Australia, 2000–01.....	62
Figure 10.1: Customs border detections of heroin, by number and total weight, Australia, 1992–93 to 2001–02 .....	81
Figure 10.2: Customs border detections of ecstasy (MDMA), by number and total weight, Australia, 1992–93 to 2001–02 .....	82
Figure 10.3: Clandestine laboratory detections, by State and Territory, Australia, 2000–01 .....	83

# Summary

## Tobacco

According to the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), around 20% of Australians aged 14 years and over were daily smokers, while 23% were current smokers, one in four were ex-smokers and half the population had never smoked. These results are slightly different from those of the 2001 National Health Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. For a comparison of these two surveys, see the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed Findings*. The highest smoking rates were recorded among those aged 20–29 years of age, with approximately one-third of this age group reporting current smoking. Overall, men were more likely than women to be smokers. Smoking rates decreased over the period 1991 to 2001.

Tobacco smoking was responsible for the majority of drug-related deaths in 1998. Approximately 19,000 deaths and 142,500 hospital episodes were attributable to tobacco smoking.

During the 2000–01 financial year, the Commonwealth Government collected over \$5 billion in revenue from the importation and sale of tobacco products in Australia.

## Alcohol

Around 57% of males and 39% of females aged 14 years and over drank alcohol at least weekly in 2001, while a further 29% of males and 40% of females drank less than weekly. Those aged 60 years or more recorded the highest prevalence of daily drinking, with 23% of males and 11% of females drinking every day. Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of persons reporting daily or occasional drinking has remained relatively constant.

One in three persons (39% of males, 30% of females) consumed alcohol in a manner that put themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm in the short term on at least one day in the last 12 months. For those aged 20–29 years, the proportion was 64% of males and 57% of females. Around 10% of males and 9% of females consumed alcohol in a way that put themselves at risk of alcohol-related harm in the long term.

## Illicit drugs

In 1998, 1,023 deaths (or approximately 4% of drug-related deaths) were associated with illicit drug use. Of the total number of hospital episodes related to drug use in 1997–98, around 7% were attributable to the use of illicit substances.

Approximately 17% of Australians reported using any illicit drug in the 12 months preceding the 2001 NDSHS. Marijuana/cannabis was the most common illicit drug used, with 12.9% of those aged 14 years and over having used the drug in the last 12 months, 7.8% having used in the last month and 5.6% having used in the last week. Rates of marijuana/cannabis use, as for most illicit drugs, have remained relatively stable over the

past decade, although rates for other drugs are much lower than for marijuana/cannabis. Amphetamines were used in the last 12 months by 3.4% of those aged 14 years and over, while 2.9% had used ecstasy/designer drugs, and less than 1% had used heroin or injected an illegal drug during the previous 12 months.

## Pharmaceuticals

Of the 208 million prescription medicines prescribed in 2001, approximately 80% were subsidised by the Commonwealth Government. The top two prescription medicines distributed through community pharmacies, by cost to government and by defined daily dose per 1,000 population per day, were both medications prescribed for lipid reduction (lowering of cholesterol). Of the drugs that affect the central nervous system, anti-depressants were the most widely consumed, with a total of 51.5 defined daily doses per 1,000 population per day.

## International comparisons

The decline in smoking rates in Australia over the period 1971 to 2001 leaves Australia ranked third lowest in the world in 2001 behind Sweden and the United States in terms of the prevalence of daily smoking.

In 2000, Australia ranked 19th highest in the world in terms of per capita consumption of alcohol, with approximately 7.8 litres equivalent of pure alcohol consumed per person. This corresponded to an annual per capita consumption of around 95.0 litres of beer, 19.7 litres of wine and 1.3 litres of pure alcohol from spirits.

## Drugs and health

In 1998, approximately 19,000 deaths were attributed to tobacco use, while 2,524 were alcohol-related and 1,023 were associated with illicit drugs. In the same year, it has been estimated that overall 2,371 net deaths were averted due to the protective health effect of low-risk levels of alcohol consumption.

The number of new AIDS diagnoses among injecting drug users decreased from 84 in 1993 to 10 in 2001, while the number of deaths due to AIDS similarly decreased from 59 in 1993 to 16 in 2001 in this at-risk group.

The death rate from accidental opioid overdose among people aged 15–44 years increased from 45.3 deaths per million persons in 1988 to peak at 112.5 deaths per million persons in 1999; however, by 2001 the death rate had fallen sharply to 35.9 deaths per million persons.

The proportion of fatally injured drivers and motorcycle riders with blood alcohol concentration of 0.05 g/100 mL or more decreased from 44% in 1981 to 26% in 1998.

## Special population groups

In 2001, slightly less than one in three teenagers (31%) aged 14–17 years reported using an illicit drug at least once in their lifetime, while close to one in four (23%) reported using an

illicit drug in the previous 12 months. Most illicit drug use among those aged 14–17 years was marijuana/cannabis use.

In 2001, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were twice as likely to smoke, drink at levels that significantly increase the risk of harm in the short and long terms, and use illicit drugs than were non-Indigenous Australians. Around half of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported smoking while 45% reported daily smoking in 2001. One in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reported patterns of alcohol drinking that substantially increased the risk of harm in the long term.

In relation to people seeking supported accommodation, the proportion of all episodes of support that included assistance and support for alcohol, drug and substance abuse increased from 16% in 1998–99 to 25% in 2001–02.

## **Treatment services**

In 2000–01, the principal drug for which clients of treatment service agencies sought treatment was alcohol (34%), followed by heroin (28%), marijuana/cannabis (14%) and amphetamines (9%).

## **Crime and law enforcement**

Marijuana/cannabis accounted for 69% of illicit drug arrests in 2001, compared with 11% related to amphetamine-type substances and 9% to heroin. In 2000–01, 83% of illicit drug arrests were related to drug consumption rather than to the provision or sale of drugs.

In 2001, 1,852 people, or 10.2% of all sentenced prisoners, were imprisoned for drug-related offences. Of these, 81% were imprisoned for dealing or trafficking drugs. Results based on the 2001 Drug Use Careers of Offenders survey show that 70% of male sentenced prisoners used an illicit drug in the 6 months before their arrest, while 20% were dependent on alcohol and 44% on an illicit drug.

## **Polydrug use**

According to the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, substance users were more likely than non-users to use other drugs. For example, tobacco users were four times as likely to use marijuana/cannabis than non-smokers. Similar results were observed when users of alcohol, marijuana/cannabis and amphetamine-type substances were compared with non-users.

## **Drug avoidance and moderation**

In 2001, 87% of non-smokers avoided environmental tobacco smoke some or all of the time. Around 8% of smokers had participated in quit-smoking programs, while three in 10 smokers unsuccessfully tried to give up smoking, and one in five changed to a cigarette brand with lower tar or nicotine content. Around half of alcohol drinkers reported behaviours resulting in lower alcohol consumption; however, less than 1% reported participation in an alcohol treatment program.

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# Abbreviations

AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AODTS-NMDS	Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set
ATS	Amphetamine-type substance(s)
BAC	Blood alcohol concentration
BEACH	Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health
DDD	Defined daily dose per 1,000 population per day
DUCO	Drug Use Careers of Offenders
DUMA	Drug Use Monitoring in Australia
GP	General practitioner
IDRS	Illicit Drug Reporting System
MDMA	3,4 methylenedioxymethylamphetamine (ecstasy)
NDSHS	National Drug Strategy Household Survey
NHS	National Health Survey
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
RPBS	Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
UNODCCP	United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
n.a.	Not available
-	Nil, or rounded to zero
..	Not applicable
*	Result unreliable as the relative standard error was greater than 50%
g	Gram(s)
kg	Kilogram(s)
mL	Millilitre(s)
m	Million