

# **Drug use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

**An assessment of data sources**

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# **Drug use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

**An assessment of data sources**

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## Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALSWH	Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health
AODTS-NMDS	Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set
ASGC	Australian Standard Geographic Classification
ASSAD	Australian Schools Students Alcohol and other Drug Survey
BEACH	Bettering the Evaluation and Care of Health survey of general practice activity
BTOM-C	Brief Treatment Outcome Measure-Concise
CATI	Computer-assisted telephone interview
CAYLUS	Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service Inhalant Substance Misuse Database
CSTDA-NMDS	Commonwealth-State/Territory Disability Agreement National Minimum Data Set
DASR	Drug and Alcohol Services Report – annual data collected from Australian Government funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander substance use specific services
DoHA	Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
DUCO	Drug Use Careers of Offenders
DVA	Australian Government Department of Veterans' Affairs
DUMA	Drug Use Monitoring in Australia
FaCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
GCS	General Customer Survey
GP	General practitioner
GSS	General Social Survey
HBV	Hepatitis B Virus
HCV	Hepatitis C Virus
HILDA	Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IDIS	Indigenous Drug Injectors Study (South Australia)
IDDR	Illicit Drug Data Report
IDRS-IDU	Illicit Drugs Reporting System-Injecting Drug Users
IDRS-PDI	Illicit Drugs Reporting System-Party Drug Initiative
IDU	Injecting Drug User
IGCD	Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs
KHLS	Kids Help Line Statistics
LDS	Longitudinal Data Set 1% Sample
LSAC	Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

LSIC	Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children
MCDS	Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NAGATSIHD	National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Data
NAPEDCD	National Non-admitted Patient Emergency Department Care Database
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NCIS	National Coroners Information System
NCMHCD	National Community Mental Health Care Database
NCSD	<i>National Community Services Data Dictionary</i>
NDSHS	National Drug Strategy Household Survey
NHDD	<i>National Health Data Dictionary</i>
NHMD	National Hospital Morbidity Database
NHS	National Health Survey
NIDAC	National Indigenous Data and Alcohol Committee
NMD	National Mortality Database
NMDS	National Minimum Data Set
NOPSAD	National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data collection
NPC	National Prisoner Census
NPCS	National Police Custody Survey
NPDC	National Perinatal Data Collection
NPEBVS	National Prison Entrants' Bloodborne Virus Survey
NRMHCD	National Residential Mental Health Care Database
NSMHW (C & A)	National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (children and adolescents)
NSMHW (psychotic)	National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (low prevalence (psychotic) disorders)
NSP	Australian Needle and Syringe Program Survey
NSW MDS-DATS	New South Wales Minimum Data Set for Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services
NSW-IHS	New South Wales Inmate Health Survey
NSW-PHS	New South Wales Population Health Survey
NT PDSDB	Northern Territory Police Drug Seizure Data Base
OATSIH	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
PDU	Party drug users
QLD-WPHS	Queensland Women Prisoners' Health Survey
SAAP-NDC	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program National Data Collection
SAR	Service Activity Reporting – annual data collection from Australian Government funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services
SCATSIH	Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

SDAC	Survey(s) of Disability, Ageing and Carers
SLA	Statistical Local Area
SOMIH	State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing
VIC-PHS	Victorian Prisoner Health Study
WAACHS	Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey
YACR	Youth Alcohol Consumption Research, formerly the National Alcohol Campaign tracking research
YPiCHS	Young People in Custody Health Survey

# Summary

## Background and project methodology

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, on behalf of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy, to identify and report on the current state of data collections relating to substance use issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, and set out options for improving these data. The report achieves this by reviewing relevant data sources, highlighting inconsistencies between them and identifying data gaps. Data sources are assessed in terms of their capacity to answer a series of key questions, highlighted both by stakeholders through a workshop and by a literature review. While options are suggested for new analyses of existing data sources, this project does not involve analysing the data sources to answer these key questions.

An analytical framework is used throughout the report to organise the contextual information relating to Indigenous substance use. The five domains of the framework are intended to capture:

- contemporary patterns and trends in the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs
- the contextual factors associated with substance use *and* non-use, including exposure to preventive initiatives
- recognised harms associated with tobacco, alcohol and other drug use
- intervention and treatment services currently operating to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with substance use problems
- estimated expenditure on preventive, intervention and treatment programs and associated services, including health and long-term care.

Throughout this report, the term 'substance use' is used to refer to the use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs. 'Other drugs' may include both illicit drugs and other drugs used illicitly.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain an overview of the literature review and the stakeholder workshop undertaken to guide the assessment of data sources relating to Indigenous substance use. More comprehensive information on these aspects of the project is included in Appendixes 1 and 2 respectively.

## Key questions

The work on the literature review (Chapter 2) and discussions at the workshop (Chapter 3) revealed consistent themes in the types of information required about Indigenous substance use and its associated harms. Drawing on both of these sources, the key questions for the field appear to be about:

- the nature or patterns of substance use among Indigenous substance users (for example, prevalence of substance use, type of substance used, frequency of use, age at first use, geographic variation, risk behaviours)
- the characteristics of Indigenous substance users and their context, including their social context; social participation; influence of and exposure to family functioning and resilience, and family stressors and disruption; and exposure to substance use in the community

- mortality, morbidity and disability among Indigenous substance users
- other associated harms, such as violence, crime, detention, imprisonment and homelessness
- the affordability, accessibility and appropriateness of current approaches for intervention and treatment of substance use in Indigenous peoples
- what is working well in terms of intervention, treatment and prevention, why it is working and what extra measures or initiatives could make a difference
- expenditure relating to treatment and other interventions.

Three main information needs (agreed at the stakeholder workshop) cut across the key questions, namely the need for:

- community-level and individual information
- whole-of-government and cross-sectoral information
- timely information on emerging trends and patterns.

## **Information currently available**

There are difficulties in collecting reliable information about substance use among Australians, particularly in relation to the use of illicit substances, and these complexities and sensitivities are amplified when collecting such information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly those living in small communities.

Nevertheless, Australia has a relatively large number of data sources that could be further developed and used in combination to provide better understanding of substance use, and contributing contextual factors, among Indigenous people. A total of 44 data sources were reviewed for this project and compared in terms of their methodology and data items (as per the information framework). In brief, the current information landscape includes:

- Indigenous-specific population surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey) that collect information about substance use as well as a range of contextual information
- a drug-specific population survey on drug use behaviours and perceptions (the National Drug Strategy Household Survey)
- administrative data collections which describe the characteristics of people accessing mainstream alcohol and other drug treatment services, Indigenous-specific substance use treatment services and a range of other health services (for example, hospitals and general practitioners) and community services interventions (for example, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program), as well as providing information about the types of services these people receive
- the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, which describes the health and social context of Indigenous children, and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (currently under development)
- other surveys relating to substance use (for example, the Illicit Drug Reporting System–Injecting Drug Users and the Indigenous Drug Injectors Survey, which are surveys of injecting drug users, and the Youth Alcohol Consumption Research, which tracks awareness of the National Alcohol Campaign among young people)

- a range of surveys about the health and substance use patterns of people in custody (for example, Drug Use Careers of Offenders, Drug Use Monitoring in Australia, New South Wales Inmate Health Survey)
- a number of data sources about drug-related arrests and drug seizures (for example, the Northern Territory Police Drug Seizure Data Base and the Illicit Drug Data Report collection).

## **Extent to which available information answers key questions**

Each of the reviewed data sources was developed with a specific purpose, which is reflected in their methodology (including scope and counting rules) and selection of data items. It is not realistic to expect each of these data sources in isolation to meet all of the information needs relating to Indigenous substance use and its associated contextual factors. Rather, it is desirable that, overall, they provide a national picture with, for example, sufficient coverage of relevant population subgroups and geography. Equally important are the comparability of data items and availability of information over time, so that the reviewed data sources can be used as a set to paint a picture of the current situation, trends and emerging issues.

The set of reviewed data sources was assessed in terms of its capacity to answer the key questions identified in Chapter 4. Information gaps were highlighted and then prioritised to those that are considered essential, practical, least burdensome to survey participants and other data providers, and most likely to 'make a difference'. Overall, available data sources on this subject are somewhat inadequate, in that they fail to provide answers to many of the key questions expressed by stakeholders.

## **Options for improving information**

Key options for improving information about substance use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are summarised here and explained in greater detail in Chapter 7.

1. Continue promoting the fundamental importance of accurate identification of Indigenous status across all data sources, including targeting for attention those data collections that use 'non-Indigenous' as the default response.
2. Improve population estimates of substance use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by:
  - (a) increasing the comparability of the data items in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey and National Drug Strategy Household Survey (see also option 3)
  - (b) supporting the Australian Bureau of Statistics in developing methodologies to obtain improved estimates of substance use among Indigenous people in rural and remote locations (via the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey)
  - (c) improving the methodology (for example, increasing the sample size for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) of the National Drug Strategy Household Survey to allow better estimates of prevalence of Indigenous substance use and related factors
  - (d) supporting efforts to develop prevalence estimates for community populations, based on a community epidemiology approach (see also option 5).

3. Develop a 'drug-specific data module' for use in population surveys (for example, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, National Drug Strategy Household Survey), other surveys (for example, corrections-related collections such as Drug Use Monitoring in Australia and Drug Use Careers of Offenders), and administrative data sources (for example, those describing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care and substance use services, mainstream alcohol and other drug treatment services). Such a module would include data standards and counting rules to promote consistency across collections and could include data items relating to substance use, individual characteristics and contextual factors. Such a module could be used at various levels of detail, depending on the purpose. A draft drug-specific data module could be rapidly developed, based on the work done for this report.
4. Improve information about Indigenous people accessing alcohol and other treatment services by:
  - (a) working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care and substance use services to increase the availability of nationally comparable client-level information, for example:
    - (i) thoroughly analysing existing data held in these services; and/or
    - (ii) developing a national minimum data set based on the contents of current data holdings and future data requirements as expressed by these agencies and other key stakeholders; and/or
    - (iii) working towards creating a place for the safe storage and use of client-level data.
  - (b) ensuring that data development work in relation to 4(a) includes efforts to routinely collect and collate data on client outcomes, including information about what works and why, and what doesn't work and why not
  - (c) ensuring that data development work in relation to 4(a) harmonises, where possible, with national data standards and other administrative data sources relating to substance use treatment (see also option 3).
5. Develop an appropriate methodology for gathering timely information about emerging issues of most relevance to the subject of Indigenous substance use ('environmental scan of emerging issues'). This scan would produce community-level information that could identify local supply and demand issues and risks as well as highlight the characteristics of 'strong communities' versus 'communities at risk'.
6. Bring together available information in innovative ways to provide an overview of substance use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and its associated harms. Such a report would make the best possible use of the extensive data sources already in place and could address a number of themes raised throughout the report. These themes include the need to disseminate information with content and format suited to a variety of needs, to present community-level information and to publish information about death, disease, comorbidity and disability among Indigenous substance users.

Many of the above options are inter-related. For example, the development of a 'drug-specific data module' (option 3) would assist in improving comparability across data sources (options 2 and 4), and the overview and synthesis of information (option 6) could assist in identifying core data items for inclusion in a 'drug-specific data module'.