



Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia

Purpose of AODTS–NMDS

The Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS–NMDS) has been implemented to assist in monitoring and evaluating key objectives of the National Drug Strategy and to assist in the planning, management and quality improvement of alcohol and other drug treatment services. In general, it aims to provide ongoing information on the demographics of clients who use these services, the treatment they receive and administrative information about the agencies that provide alcohol and other drug treatment.

This is the third bulletin in the series of annual bulletins on the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS–NMDS).

Closed treatment episodes

The analysis in this bulletin is based on ‘closed treatment episodes’. A closed treatment episode refers to a period of contact, with defined dates of commencement and cessation, between a client and a treatment agency. A closed treatment episode may be for a specific treatment, such as information and education only, that may not be part of a larger treatment plan, or for a specific treatment, such as withdrawal management (detoxification), that may be part of a long-term treatment plan. See ‘Introduction’ in AIHW (2004:1) for more details.

Treatment agencies

- A national total of 587 government-funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies supplied data for 2002–03. The overall response rate for in-scope treatment agencies was 94%.
- Fifty-five per cent of treatment agencies were identified as non-government agencies.
- Treatment agencies were most likely to be located in major cities (56%) and inner regional areas (25%).

Client profile

- During 2002–03, there were 130,930 closed treatment episodes in alcohol and other drug treatment services reported in the AODTS–NMDS collection. These episodes related to an estimated 108,042 client registrations. On average, each of these registrations accounted for 1.2 treatment episodes during the year.
- Ninety-four per cent of closed treatment episodes in 2002–03 involved clients seeking treatment for their own alcohol or other drug use. The remaining closed treatment episodes involved clients seeking treatment for another’s drug use.
- The majority of closed treatment episodes were for clients aged between 20 and 49 years (77%), with one-third of treatment episodes (33%) provided for clients in the 20–29 year age group (Table 1).
- Male clients accounted for close to two-thirds (65%) of all closed treatment episodes.
- The majority of treatment episodes were for clients born in Australia (85%) and 95% of treatment episodes were for clients whose preferred language was English.

Table 1: Closed treatment episodes by sex and age of client, Australia, 2002–03 (per cent)

Age group (years)	Males	Females	Persons ^(a)
0– 9	8.3	3.9	12.2
0– 9	22.4	10.8	33.2
0– 9	17.8	9.4	27.2
0– 9	10.5	6.2	16.7
0– 9	4.0	2.6	6.6
0+	1.4	0.8	2.3
Total^(b) (per cent)	65.3	34.5	100.0
Total^(b) (number)	85,537	45,231	130,930

(a) Includes not stated for sex.

(b) Includes not stated for age.

Source: AIHW 2004: Table 3.3.

- Nine per cent of treatment episodes (12,136) involved clients who identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, which is higher than the overall proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian population (2.4%). This figure needs to be interpreted with caution due to the high number of ‘not stated’ responses to this data item and the fact that the majority of dedicated Indigenous substance use services are not included in the AODTS–NMDS collection.

Principal drug of concern

Client profile and principal drug of concern

- Nationally in 2002–03, alcohol (38%) and cannabis (22%) were the most common principal drugs of concern to clients in closed treatment episodes, followed by heroin (18%) and amphetamines (11%) (Table 2).
- For the 15,045 closed treatment episodes where clients were in the 10–19 year age group, cannabis was the principal drug most commonly involved (50%). This varied between sexes: 55% for males and 38% for females in this age group.
- For closed treatment episodes involving 20–29 year olds there was a fairly even distribution across the four main drugs of concern (alcohol, cannabis, heroin and amphetamines), with younger clients much more likely to report cannabis, and older clients to report alcohol.
- Alcohol was the drug most commonly involved in treatment episodes for both sexes (39% for males and 35% for females). This was followed by cannabis for males (24%) and cannabis and heroin for females (19% each) (Figure 1).
- Treatment episodes involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were most likely to involve alcohol (46%), cannabis (23%), heroin (12%) and amphetamines (11%)—that is, the same four principal drugs of concern as the population overall, but with alcohol more likely to be nominated (46% compared to 38% for other Australians) and heroin less so (12% compared to 18% for other Australians).