

17 Awareness of drug problems and drug regulations

Drugs thought to be causing the most deaths in Australia

In 1998 nearly two-fifths (39%) of Australians aged 14 years and over reported that tobacco, directly or indirectly, caused the most drug-related deaths in Australia (Table 17.1). More than a quarter (27%) reported alcohol caused the most drug-related deaths in Australia. The survey also showed that:

- More than one in five (22%) Australians aged 14 years and over reported narcotics such as heroin being the cause of most drug-related deaths in Australia.
- Nearly one in 20 (5%) Australians aged 14 years and over thought cocaine caused the most deaths in Australia.
- More males (42%) than females (35%) reported tobacco being the cause of most drug-related deaths in Australia. However, more females (24%) than males (20%) thought narcotics caused the most deaths in Australia.

Table 17.1: Drugs thought to cause the most deaths in Australia: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Drug	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
Tobacco	31.1	47.2	48.0	47.6	40.0	34.8	42.4
Cocaine	5.9	2.8	3.3	3.4	7.6	6.7	4.7
Marijuana/cannabis	2.5	0.5	0.8	0.6	1.4	3.3	1.4
Narcotics (e.g. heroin)	21.3	18.3	15.3	16.9	22.2	27.3	20.0
Alcohol	28.7	28.1	28.5	28.0	24.6	24.0	27.0
Prescribed drugs	0.1	0.7	1.6	1.0	0.9	1.4	1.0
Amphetamines	10.4	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.2	2.7	3.5
Females							
Tobacco	32.1	35.0	37.4	40.5	33.9	30.1	34.9
Cocaine	5.2	4.8	3.2	3.4	3.7	7.9	4.8
Marijuana/cannabis	2.8	1.2	0.9	3.0	3.0	4.2	2.5
Narcotics (e.g. heroin)	26.9	23.5	25.4	18.4	23.2	25.8	23.7
Alcohol	23.1	26.7	27.1	29.4	30.1	24.7	26.9
Prescribed drugs	1.0	2.3	2.3	1.7	4.1	3.5	2.6
Amphetamines	8.9	6.7	3.7	3.7	2.0	3.7	4.6
Persons							
Tobacco	31.6	41.1	42.7	44.1	37.0	32.2	38.6
Cocaine	5.6	3.7	3.2	3.4	5.7	7.3	4.8
Marijuana/cannabis	2.7	0.8	0.9	1.8	2.2	3.8	2.0
Narcotics (e.g. heroin)	24.1	20.9	20.3	17.6	22.7	26.5	21.9
Alcohol	25.9	27.4	27.8	28.7	27.3	24.4	26.9
Prescribed drugs	0.5	1.5	2.0	1.4	2.5	2.6	1.8
Amphetamines	9.7	4.6	3.1	3.1	2.6	3.3	4.0

Likely source of information on health effects of drugs

When respondents were asked where they would go if they required information on the health effects of drugs, the survey showed that:

- The most frequently cited potential source of information on the health effects of drug use was a doctor/medical centre/clinic (50%).
- More than one in ten (13%) said that they would contact the health department.
- The proportion of persons who would contact an alcohol and drug counselling service was 13%.
- Females (14%) were twice as likely as males (7%) to contact a community health centre for information on the health effects of drugs.

Table 17.2: Nominated likely source of information on the health effects of alcohol and other drugs: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Information source	Males	Females	Persons
	(per cent)		
Drug and alcohol information service/drug advisory centre	7.1	8.9	8.0
Alcohol and drug counselling service ^(a)	11.2	13.8	12.5
Cancer council/National Heart Foundation	0.7	1.1	0.9
Telephone information service	0.8	0.8	0.8
Community health centre	6.9	13.7	10.4
Drop-in centre/community centre	1.2	2.1	1.7
Welfare worker	1.3	0.8	1.1
Library	4.7	7.6	6.2
Chemist	4.6	3.8	4.2
Doctor/medical centre/clinic	49.4	50.9	50.2
Other health worker	0.7	0.7	0.7
Hospital	6.1	8.3	7.2
Health department	13.4	12.1	12.7
Other government department or service	7.4	6.5	6.9
Friend/relative about the same age (e.g. sibling)	2.0	1.7	1.8
Parent	1.3	1.3	1.3
Other relative	0.5	0.3	0.4
Priest/church	0.5	0.6	0.5
Teacher/school/university	3.3	3.5	3.4
Books/journals/magazines	2.1	2.8	2.5
Internet	3.5	2.1	2.8
Quit line	1.3	1.8	1.6
Other	1.4	0.9	1.2
Can't say	10.8	10.4	10.6

(a) Includes Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Perceived health risk from passive smoking

The 1998 survey asked respondents whether or not those non-smokers who live with smokers might one day develop health problems because of other person's cigarette smoke. The survey showed that:

- More than four-fifths (83%) of Australians aged 14 years and over thought that non-smokers who live with smokers might develop health problems one day.
- More females (85%) than males (81%) reported that non-smokers living with smokers might develop health problems one day.

Table 17.3: Perceived health risk from passive smoking: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Perceived risk	Age group						All ages
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	
(per cent)							
Males							
Yes	86.5	86.6	85.0	76.3	81.9	71.4	81.0
No	7.0	5.7	6.7	11.6	14.0	18.4	10.6
Not sure	6.4	7.7	8.3	12.1	4.2	10.2	8.4
Females							
Yes	95.1	86.8	87.7	82.6	83.7	78.8	84.9
No	2.0	5.2	5.9	10.5	9.8	12.2	8.1
Not sure	2.9	7.9	6.4	6.9	6.5	9.1	7.0
Persons							
Yes	90.7	86.7	86.4	79.4	82.8	75.4	83.0
No	4.6	5.5	6.3	11.1	11.9	15.0	9.3
Not sure	4.7	7.8	7.4	9.5	5.3	9.6	7.7

Health risk from alcohol

The 1998 survey asked respondents about their awareness of the health risks of alcohol consumption. Respondents were specifically asked about their knowledge of the number of standard drinks an adult can consume in a day. The NHMRC suggests that an adult male can consume four standard drinks and an adult female can drink two standard drinks before the health of the consumer might be affected. The survey showed that:

- About one in six (17%) Australians aged 14 years and over correctly identified the number of standard drinks for an adult male.
- One in three (34%) Australians aged 14 years and over correctly identified the number of standard drinks for an adult female.
- In general, as age increased, the proportion of Australians correctly identifying the number of standard drinks increased.

Table 17.4: Correct identification of the recommended number of standard drinks per day: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Age group	Correctly identify number of standard drinks for males	Correctly identify number of standard drinks for females
	(per cent)	
	Males	
14–19	9.6	27.2
20–29	16.4	31.0
30–39	15.5	35.1
40–49	17.7	29.2
50–59	20.4	32.4
60+	16.6	27.3
All ages	16.3	30.6
	Females	
14–19	13.1	33.2
20–29	14.1	34.1
30–39	13.8	41.7
40–49	17.7	41.2
50–59	19.5	34.7
60+	21.3	39.1
All ages	16.7	38.0
	Persons	
14–19	11.2	30.0
20–29	15.3	32.5
30–39	14.6	38.4
40–49	17.7	35.3
50–59	20.0	33.5
60+	19.0	33.4
All ages	16.5	34.2

When respondents were further asked about whether or not they knew about the information on the number of standard drinks shown on cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages, only 29% of respondents reported knowing it (Table 17.5). The survey also showed that:

- Males (38%) were more likely than females (20%) to know that the number of standard drinks is shown on cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages. However, the survey did not ask about the details of respondents' knowledge.
- The higher the age, the lower the likelihood of the knowledge that cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages contain information regarding the number of standard drinks.

Table 17.5: Knowledge that numbers of standard drinks are shown on cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Knowledge status	Age group						
	14–19	20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60+	All ages
(per cent)							
Males							
Yes	45.9	56.8	40.7	29.4	31.4	23.0	37.8
No	24.2	27.3	39.6	46.1	42.8	41.1	37.4
Not sure	29.9	16.0	19.7	24.5	25.8	35.9	24.7
Females							
Yes	33.0	38.2	21.6	14.1	11.9	6.1	19.9
No	39.0	39.0	47.4	44.9	38.6	34.0	40.6
Not sure	28.0	22.8	31.0	41.0	49.5	59.8	39.5
Persons							
Yes	39.6	47.6	31.1	21.7	21.9	13.8	28.8
No	31.4	33.1	43.5	45.5	40.8	37.2	39.0
Not sure	29.0	19.3	25.4	32.8	37.3	49.0	32.2

Awareness of regulations relating to the use of marijuana/cannabis

The 1998 survey asked respondents about their awareness of regulations relating to marijuana/cannabis use. As each State/Territory has its own regulations, the national data presented in Table 17.6 may be misleading. The survey found that:

- Less than 1% of Australians aged 14 years and over thought that activities such as growing, possessing and selling marijuana/cannabis were legal.
- More than one in five (23%) Australians aged 14 years and over thought that possessing equipment for smoking or using marijuana/cannabis was legal.
- The proportion of Australians aged 14 years and over reporting that the use of a small quantity of marijuana/cannabis is a legal activity was 17%, the proportion reporting growing small quantities of marijuana/cannabis is a legal activity was 15%, and the proportion reporting that possessing a small quantity of marijuana/cannabis is legal was 17%.

Table 17.6: Knowledge of legal status of marijuana/cannabis activities: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Activity	Males			Females			Persons		
	Legal	Illegal	Unsure	Legal	Illegal	Unsure	Legal	Illegal	Unsure
	(per cent)								
Grow marijuana/cannabis for supply to others	0.9	97.4	1.6	0.6	97.6	1.8	0.8	97.5	1.7
Possess marijuana/cannabis for supply to others	1.0	97.3	1.6	0.5	97.7	1.8	0.8	97.5	1.7
Sell marijuana/cannabis to someone else for money	0.5	98.5	1.0	0.3	98.5	1.2	0.4	98.5	1.1
Sell a small quantity of marijuana/cannabis to someone else for their personal use	2.0	94.4	3.7	1.8	93.8	4.4	1.9	94.1	4.0
Actually use small quantities of marijuana/cannabis	16.9	72.5	10.6	17.3	71.5	11.2	17.1	72.0	10.9
Grow small quantities of marijuana/cannabis for personal use	14.7	76.2	9.1	14.7	75.5	9.8	14.7	75.8	9.5
Possess small quantities of marijuana/cannabis for personal use	17.6	72.7	9.7	16.3	73.3	10.3	17.0	73.0	10.0
Possess implements for smoking or using marijuana/cannabis	25.4	62.5	12.1	20.4	65.2	14.4	22.9	63.8	13.3
Drive a vehicle after smoking marijuana/cannabis	10.6	76.6	12.8	9.8	77.2	13.0	10.2	76.9	12.9

Understanding of the term ‘decriminalised’

The 1998 survey asked respondents about their understanding of the term ‘decriminalised’ in relation to drug use. The respondents were given two meanings to choose from. The survey showed that:

- More than one in three (36%) Australians aged 14 years and over reported the meaning of ‘decriminalised’ in relation to drug use as ‘illegal, caution, small fine up to \$200 applies’, while more than half (53%) reported the meaning as ‘legal, no penalty applies’ (Table 17.7).
- Slightly more males (41%) than females (32%) reported the meaning of ‘decriminalised’ as illegal, while more females (54%) than males (51%) thought ‘decriminalised’ meant legal.

Table 17.7: Understanding of the term 'decriminalised': proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Meaning of the term 'decriminalised'	Age group						All ages
	14-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
	(per cent)						
	Males						
Legal, no penalty applies	44.8	48.8	54.3	51.9	53.0	51.6	51.1
Illegal, caution, small fine up to \$200 applies	36.3	42.7	38.8	42.2	41.9	40.9	40.7
Don't know	18.8	8.6	6.9	5.9	5.1	7.5	8.2
	Females						
Legal, no penalty applies	40.5	51.7	61.5	60.3	62.1	46.3	54.2
Illegal, caution, small fine up to \$200 applies	30.6	33.1	28.7	31.7	31.1	36.1	32.1
Don't know	28.9	15.1	9.9	8.0	6.8	17.7	13.7
	Persons						
Legal, no penalty applies	42.7	50.2	57.9	56.1	57.5	48.7	52.7
Illegal, caution, small fine up to \$200 applies	33.5	38.0	33.7	37.0	36.6	38.2	36.4
Don't know	23.8	11.8	8.4	6.9	5.9	13.1	11.0