



The non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs is an **ongoing public health problem in Australia**, with evidence suggesting an increase in associated harms including mortality.



In 2019, people from **Remote and very remote** areas were **1.5 times as likely** as those from Major cities to have used pharmaceuticals for non-medical reasons.<sup>[2]</sup>



**Pain-killers/opioids** were the most common pharmaceutical used for non-medical reasons in 2019, followed by tranquilisers/sleeping pills.<sup>[2]</sup>



Between 2009 and 2018, the number of **deaths** where benzodiazepines were present **rose** by 70%.<sup>[1]</sup>



In 2019, Australians were more likely to approve of **non-medical use** of pain-killers/opioids (12.4%) and tranquilisers / sleeping pills (9.3%) than other illicit drugs except cannabis.<sup>[2]</sup>

Benzodiazepines and other sedatives and hypnotics (including barbiturates; excluding ethanol) accounted for more drug-related hospital separations than opioids in 2017–18 (7.3% compared with 6.4%).<sup>[4]</sup>



The rate of **dispensed prescriptions for pharmaceutical opioids** has **increased** by 11% between 2012–13 and 2016–17.<sup>[3]</sup>



Pharmaceuticals were the **principal drug of concern** in **4.7%** of closed alcohol and other drug treatment episodes in 2018–19.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Aged 14+ <sup>[2]</sup>

**1 in 25** (4.2%) people reported **recent non-medical use** of a pharmaceutical



**1 in 9** (11.7%) people **ever** used a pharmaceutical non-medically



In 2019, people with **mental health conditions** were **2.1x as likely** as those without mental health conditions to have recently used pharmaceuticals for non-medical reasons.<sup>[2]</sup>



National Drug Strategy Household Survey findings relate to people aged 14 or older unless specified. An adult is a person aged 18 or older.<sup>[2]</sup>

1. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2020. AIHW analysis of the National Mortality Database.
2. AIHW 2020. [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019](#). Drug statistics series no. 32. Cat. no. PHE 270. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 3 August 2020.

3. AIHW 2018. [Opioid harm in Australia and comparisons between Australia and Canada](#). Cat. no. HSE 210. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 9 November 2018.
4. AIHW analysis of the National Hospital Morbidity Database 2017–18.
5. AIHW 2020. [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2018–19: key findings](#). Web Report. Viewed 26 June 2020.

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020



Any enquiries about copyright and/or this fact sheet should be directed to: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, GPO Box 570, Canberra ACT 2601, Tel: (02) 6244 1000, Email: <info@aihw.gov.au>.

For more detail, see the full report, [Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in Australia](#), which can be downloaded for free from the AIHW website.



Stronger evidence,  
better decisions,  
improved health and welfare