

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in Australia

Illicit opioids including heroin



Heroin use among the Australian general population is low, with <0.1%* reporting consumption in the last 12 months in 2019.^[1]



Opioid use was responsible for 1.0% of the total burden of disease and injuries in Australia in 2015, and 37% of the total burden due to illicit drug use.^[2]

Main contributors to opioid use disease and injury burden in 2015:

- drug use disorder (excluding alcohol) 31%
- poisoning 20%.^[2]

Prior to COVID-19 in 2020, the Australian heroin market was highly stable in terms of price, purity and availability.^[8]



Hospitalisations with a

principal diagnosis of opioid (including heroin) poisoning **increased** by 25% between 2007–08 and 2016–17, rising from 14.1 to 17.6 hospitalisations per 100,000 population.^[4] In 2016–17, hospitalisations with a principal diagnosis of **opioid poisoning** were more likely to involve **pharmaceutical opioids** than heroin or opium.^[4]



The **risk of fatal overdose for heroin users is high** and has been increasing in recent years.^[5]



Wastewater data analysis indicates heroin consumption increased in Australia in 2020, but remained relatively low.^[6]



25% of the **drug-induced deaths** in Australia in 2019 were due to heroin.^[7]



In 2019–20, **heroin** was the **principal drug of concern in 5.1%** of closed alcohol and other drug treatment episodes for clients' own drug use.^[3]

In 2019, **43%*** of people who recently used heroin said they **tried to stop or cut down** in the last 3 months **but could not**.^[1]

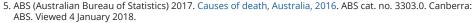
National Drug Strategy Household Survey findings relate to people aged 14 or older unless specified. An adult is a person aged 18 or older.^[1]

- (a) 2020 Illicit Drug Reporting System interviews were conducted from June–September, after COVID-19 restrictions on travel and gatherings were introduced. This should be taken into account when comparing data to previous years.
- * Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.
- 1. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2020. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2019. Drug statistics series no. 32. Cat. no. PHE 270. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 03 August 2020.
- 2. AIHW 2019. Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2015. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no.19. Cat. no. BOD 22. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 13 June 2019.
- 3. AIHW 2021. Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2019–20. Cat. no. HSE 250. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 16 July 2021.
- 4. AIHW 2018. Opioid harm in Australia and comparisons between Australia and Canada. Cat. no. HSE 210. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 9 November 2018.

© Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021 (co) BY

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 is available from the AIHW website.



- ACIC (Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission) 2021. National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program Report 12. Canberra: ACIC. Viewed 1 March 2021.
- 7. AIHW 2021. AIHW analysis of the National Mortality Database.
- 8. Peacock A, Uporova J, Karlsson A, Price O, Gibbs D, Swanton R et al. 2021. Australian Drug Trends 2020: Key findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) interviews. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW.



Stronger evidence, better decisions, improved health and welfare