6.15 Specialised alcohol and other drug treatment services

Alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services assist people to address their drug use through a range of treatments. Treatment objectives can include reduction or cessation of drug use as well as improving social and personal functioning. Assistance may also be provided to support the family and friends of people using drugs. Treatment services include detoxification and rehabilitation, counselling, and pharmacotherapy, and are delivered in residential and non-residential settings. Opioid pharmacotherapy is one treatment option for dependence on opioid drugs, such as heroin and morphine.

In 2011, the cost of treatment (excluding pharmacotherapy treatment alone) for illicit drug use, including amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and opioids, was estimated at $298 million (Smith et al. 2014). In addition to this, the cost of opioid pharmacotherapy treatment was estimated at $185 million.

Information on publicly funded AOD treatment services in Australia, and the people and drugs treated, are collected through the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS NMDS). The National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data (NOPSAD) collection contains information on treatment services provided to people dependent on opioid drugs.

Who uses treatment services?

Key characteristics of clients in 2014–15:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AOD publicly funded agencies (2014–15)</th>
<th>Opioid pharmacotherapy (June 2015 snapshot day)</th>
<th>Recent trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Around 115,000 clients (or about 1 in 200 people in the general population) received treatment (around 170,000 episodes).</td>
<td>Over 48,000 clients (or about 1 in 700 people) were on a course of pharmacotherapy treatment for dependence on opioid drugs.</td>
<td>There have been small but steady increases in client numbers in recent years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just over 2 in 3 clients (67%) were male.</td>
<td>Nearly 2 in 3 clients (65%) were male.</td>
<td>This profile has remained consistent over time across both client groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over half of clients (54%) were aged 20–39.</td>
<td>Clients were slightly older on average than those in AOD agencies—more than 2 in 3 (68%) were aged 30–49.</td>
<td>In recent years the age profile of people receiving treatment suggests an ageing cohort across both client groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearly 1 in 7 (15%) clients were Indigenous Australians.</td>
<td>One in 10 clients (10%) were Indigenous Australians.</td>
<td>Indigenous Australians continue to be over-represented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Key characteristics of clients in 2014–15 (continued):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AOD publicly funded agencies (2014–15)</th>
<th>Opioid pharmacotherapy (June 2015 snapshot day)</th>
<th>Recent trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most clients (86%) received treatment at one agency.</td>
<td>Nearly three-quarters (72%) of clients received their pharmacotherapy drug from a pharmacy.</td>
<td>This profile has remained consistent over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just over three-quarters (76%) of agencies provided treatment for up to 200 clients.</td>
<td>Two in 5 (40%) of prescribers treated between 1 and 5 clients.</td>
<td>Treatment services have continued to expand: since 2010–11 the number of AOD agencies has risen by 27% and the number of prescribers of opioid pharmacotherapy by 60%.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which drugs do people seek treatment for?

From the AODTS NMDS:

- Alcohol (38%), cannabis (24%), amphetamines (20%) and heroin (6%) were the top four drugs leading clients to seek treatment in 2014–15.
- The proportion of clients receiving treatment for alcohol increased substantially with age—whereas the opposite was true for cannabis (Figure 6.15.1).
- In more than half (53%) of treatment episodes in 2014–15, the client reported additional drugs of concern—most commonly nicotine and cannabis (AIHW 2016a).

**Figure 6.15.1: Principal drug of concern for clients, by age, 2014–15**

Source: AODTS NMDS.
From NOPSAAD:

- Heroin was the most common opioid drug of dependence for clients on a course of pharmacotherapy treatment for their opioid drug of dependence, and 2 in 3 clients were treated with methadone on a snapshot day in June 2015 (AIHW 2016b).

**What is missing from the picture?**

It is difficult to fully quantify the scope of AOD services in Australia. There are a variety of settings in which people receive treatment for alcohol and other drug-related issues that are not in scope for the AODTS NMDS. These include services provided by not-for-profit organisations and private treatment agencies that do not receive public funding; for example, hospitals, prisons, correctional facilities and detention centres, primary health care services, and accommodation services (Figure 6.15.2).

**Figure 6.15.2: AOD treatment and support services in Australia**

Note: Those in scope for the AODTS NMDS are shaded darker.
Because of the specifications for each collection and the complexities of the sectors, it is not possible to identify people who receive a course of pharmacotherapy treatment via a dosing point site as well as treatment from a publicly funded AOD service. In addition, the AODTS NMDS and the NOPSAD collection do not cover all agencies providing substance-use services to Indigenous Australians. These agencies provide data to the [Online Services Report](#) collection.

**Where do I go for more information?**


For more information on issues related to AOD treatment services, see ‘Chapter 4.5 Illicit drug use’ and ‘Chapter 4.6 Alcohol risk and harm’.

**References**

