



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



People from **remote and very remote** areas were **1.7 times more likely** than those from Major Cities to have used pharmaceuticals for non-medical purposes in 2016.^[2]



Pain-killers/opioids (excluding over-the-counter) were the most commonly misused pharmaceutical in 2016, followed by tranquilisers/sleeping pills.^[2]



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



In 2016, the **misuse of pharmaceuticals was perceived to be acceptable by 28% of Australians**, which is higher than that for the use of other drugs such as cannabis or meth/amphetamine.^[2]

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%).^[4]



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



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

Aged 14+ [2]

1 in 20 (4.8%) people misused a pharmaceutical in the last 12 months



1 in 8 (12.8%) had misused a pharmaceutical in their lifetime



People living with **mental illness (29%)** or **chronic pain (15.9%)** reported **higher levels of recent misuse of pharmaceuticals** in 2016.^[2]



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

1. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2020. AIHW analysis of the National Mortality Database.
2. AIHW 2017. [National Drug Strategy Household survey 2016: detailed findings](#). Drug statistics series no. 31. Cat. no. PHE 214. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 14 December 2017.

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.

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



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