

## 8.4 Alcohol and other drug treatment services

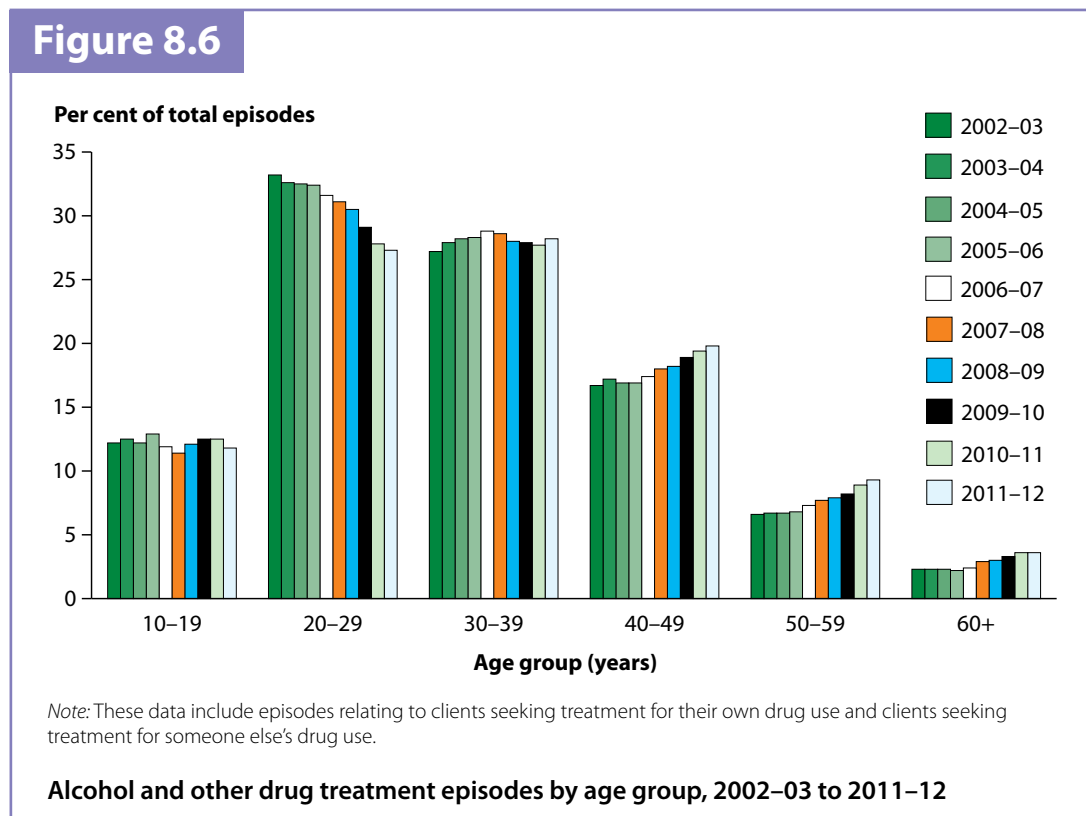
The Australian Government and state and territory governments fund a range of alcohol and other drug treatment services provided by non-government and government organisations. Services are delivered in residential and non-residential settings and include detoxification and rehabilitation programs, information and education courses, counselling, and pharmacotherapy, which involves long-acting medicines to manage opioid dependence.

The Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS NMDS) contains information on a large subset of publicly funded alcohol and other drug treatment agencies. These agencies provide services to people seeking assistance for their own drug use, people diverted from the criminal justice system and those seeking assistance for someone else's drug use.

### Who uses treatment services?

- Of the 153,688 treatment episodes completed in 2011–12, two-thirds were for male clients. Nearly all (96%) people received treatment for their own drug use and most were aged 20–29 (27%) and 30–39 (28%).
- The age profile of people using services shows clients are ageing. Over the decade to 2011–12, the proportion of treatment for people aged 20–29 fell from 33% to 27% while the proportion for those aged 40 and over rose from 26% to 33%. The proportions for those aged 10–19 and 30–39 remained steady (Figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6



The ageing profile of clients is particularly apparent for those using heroin and other opioids. The National Opioid Pharmacotherapy Statistics Annual Data Collection reveals that, from 2006 to 2013, the proportion of clients aged under 30 more than halved (from 28% to 11%) and the proportion of those aged 50 and over more than doubled (from 8% to 19%).

Illicit Drug Reporting System data also show a rise in the age of injecting drug users, with the average age rising from about 30 to 39 over the decade to 2012 (Stafford & Burns 2013).

Possible reasons for these trends include fewer premature deaths as a result of treatment availability, and a group of long-term recipients now moving into older age while continuing treatment. The 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) showed a fall in the proportion of younger people using illicit drugs, suggesting these trends seem likely to continue.

### **Which drugs do people seek treatment for?**

- Consistent with previous years, alcohol (46%) was the most common principal drug of concern in 2011–12, followed by cannabis (22%), amphetamines (11%) and heroin (9%) (Figure 8.7).
- Drugs of concern varied considerably with age. People in older age groups were more likely to have sought treatment for alcohol than those in younger age groups.
- For people aged 10–19, alcohol was the principal drug of concern in 31% of treatment episodes, while for those aged 60 and over it was the principal drug in 84% of episodes.
- For people aged 60 and over, cannabis was the principal drug of concern in only 3% of episodes, while for people aged 10–19 it was the principal drug in 50% of episodes.

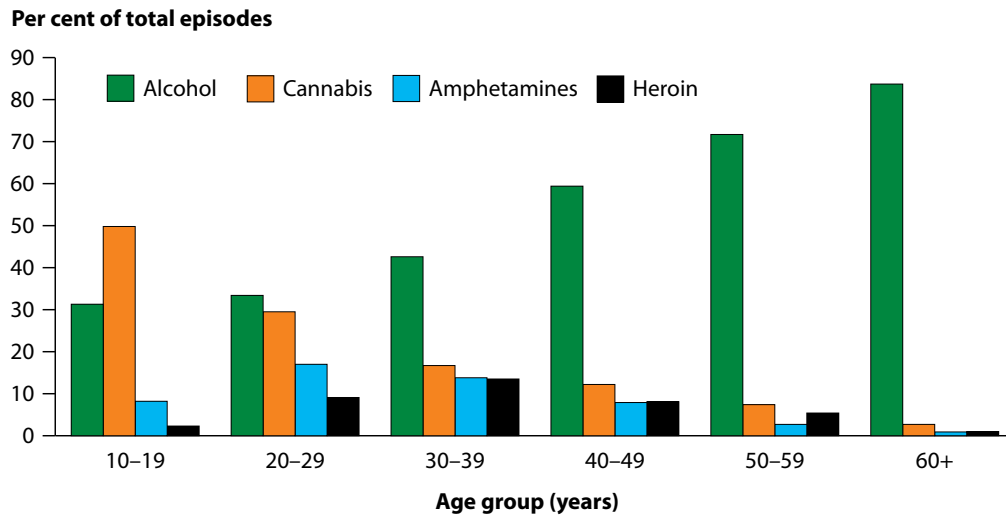
### **What is missing from the picture?**

The 2013 NDSHS, due for release in the second half of 2014, will provide up-to-date information on population-level drug use patterns, which will help us to better understand the ageing trends.

To date, the AODTS NMDS has contained data only on *completed treatment episodes* rather than on people seeking treatment. However, from the 2012–13 collection onwards, a unique person identifier included in the collection will make it possible to count client numbers and analyse treatment patterns within and across service providers.

While the majority of drug and alcohol treatment is reported through the AODTS NMDS, consolidated data on the diversion of drug offenders from the criminal justice system into treatment could be improved through development of a National Minimum Data Set.

**Figure 8.7**



Note: These data only include episodes relating to clients seeking treatment for their own drug use.

**Alcohol and other drug treatment episodes, selected principal drug of concern, by age group, 2011–12**

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

For more information on alcohol and other drug use and treatment services in Australia, see AIHW reports available online at [www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs](http://www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs).

For more information on issues related to alcohol and other drug treatment services, see Chapter 5 ‘Tobacco smoking’, ‘Alcohol risk and harm’ and ‘Illicit drug use—current and future issues’.

**Reference**

Stafford J & Burns L 2013. Australian drug trends 2012. Findings from the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS). Australian drug trend series no. 91. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales.