



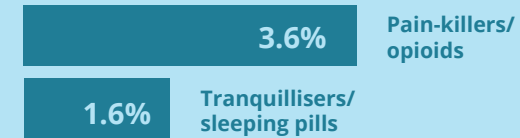
The non-medical use of pharmaceutical drugs is an **increasing public health problem in Australia**, with evidence suggesting increasing prevalence of misuse and associated harms including mortality.



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.<sup>[2]</sup>



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



Between 2008 and 2018, the number of **deaths** where benzodiazepines were present **rose** by 120%.<sup>[1]</sup>



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.<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 4.8%** of closed alcohol and other drug treatment episodes in 2017-18.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 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.<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. Man N, Chrzanowska A, Dobbins T, Degenhard, L & Peacock A 2019. [Trends in drug-induced deaths in Australia, 1997–2018](#). Drug Trends Bulletin Series. Sydney: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW Sydney. Viewed 8 January 2020.
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 2019. [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2017–18: key findings](#). Web Report. Viewed 17 April 2019.

© 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