

2 Overview—the status of drug use in 2007

The drugs most accepted by, available to and used by Australians aged 14 years or older were the licit drugs: tobacco and alcohol. Overwhelmingly, the use of illicit drugs by adults was not accepted and increased penalties for the sale and supply of these drugs were supported. Most Australians did not want illicit drugs legalised and illicit drugs were more likely than licit drugs to be associated with the concept of a drug ‘problem’.

Drugs recently used (in the last 12 months)

Between 1993 and 2007, for Australians aged 14 years or older the proportion that had recently used a drug fell for tobacco and marijuana/cannabis but rose for alcohol and most of the illicit drugs.

Table 2.1: Summary of recent^(a) drug use: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, Australia, 1993 to 2007

Drug/behaviour	1993	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Tobacco	29.1	27.2	24.9	23.2	20.7	19.4 #
Alcohol	77.9	78.3	80.7	82.4	83.6	82.9
Illicits						
Marijuana/cannabis	12.7	13.1	17.9	12.9	11.3	9.1 #
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(b)	1.7	3.5	5.2	3.1	3.1	2.5 #
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(b)	0.9	0.6	3.0	1.1	1.0	1.4 #
Steroids ^(b)	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	—	—
Barbiturates ^(b)	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
Inhalants	0.6	0.6	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.4
Heroin	0.2	0.4	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.2
Methadone ^(c) or Buprenorphine ^(e)	n.a.	n.a.	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other opiates/opioids ^(b)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.3	0.2	0.2
Meth/amphetamine (speed) ^(b)	2.0	2.1	3.7	3.4	3.2	2.3 #
Cocaine	0.5	1.0	1.4	1.3	1.0	1.6 #
Hallucinogens	1.3	1.8	3.0	1.1	0.7	0.6
Ecstasy ^(d)	1.2	0.9	2.4	2.9	3.4	3.5
Ketamine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.3	0.2
GHB	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.1	0.1
Injected drugs	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.4	0.5
<i>Any illicit</i>	14.0	17.0	22.0	16.9	15.3	13.4 #
None of the above	21.0	17.8	14.2	14.7	13.7	14.1

(a) Used in the last 12 months. For tobacco and alcohol, ‘recent use’ means daily, weekly and less-than-weekly smokers and drinkers respectively.

(b) For non-medical purposes.

(c) Non-maintenance.

(d) This category included substances known as ‘Designer drugs’ before 2004.

(e) This category did not include buprenorphine before 2007.

Difference between 2004 result and 2007 result is statistically significantly (2-tailed $\alpha = 0.05$).

- Between 1993 (29.1%) and 2007 (19.4%) there was a steady decline in the proportion of persons who had recently smoked tobacco.
- The proportion of the population recently using alcohol increased over the 11 years from 1993 to 2004, from 77.9% to 83.6% but declined slightly in 2007 to 82.9%.
- Recent use of marijuana/cannabis has declined since 1998, with the proportion of recent users in 2007 (9.1%) dropping to the lowest proportion seen since 1993.

Drugs ever used

In 2007, alcohol and tobacco were the drugs most commonly ever used by the Australian community (Table 2.2). With the exception of marijuana/cannabis, the proportion of the population who had used illicit drugs at some time in their life was relatively low.

Table 2.2: Summary of drugs ever used/tried: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, Australia, 1993 to 2007

Drug/behaviour	Ever tried ^(a)			Ever used ^(b)		
	1993	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Tobacco	50.9	47.4	50.8	49.4	47.1	44.6 #
Alcohol	88.0	87.8	89.6	90.4	90.7	89.9 #
Illicits						
Marijuana/cannabis	34.7	31.1	39.1	33.1	33.6	33.5
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(c)	n.a.	12.3	11.5	6.0	5.5	4.4 #
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(c)	n.a.	3.2	6.2	3.2	2.8	3.3 #
Steroids ^(c)	0.3	0.6	0.8	0.3	0.3	0.3
Barbiturates ^(c)	1.4	1.2	1.6	0.9	1.1	0.9
Inhalants	3.7	2.4	3.9	2.6	2.5	3.1 #
Heroin	1.7	1.4	2.2	1.6	1.4	1.6
Methadone ^(d) or Buprenorphine ^(f)	n.a.	n.a.	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3
Other opiates/opioids ^(c)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.2	1.4	0.9 #
Meth/amphetamine (speed) ^(c)	5.4	5.7	8.8	8.9	9.1	6.3 #
Cocaine	2.5	3.4	4.3	4.4	4.7	5.9 #
Hallucinogens	7.3	7.0	9.9	7.6	7.5	6.7 #
Ecstasy ^(e)	3.1	2.4	4.8	6.1	7.5	8.9 #
Ketamine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.0	1.1
GHB	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0.5	0.5
Injected drugs	1.9	1.3	2.1	1.8	1.9	1.9
<i>Any illicit</i>	38.9	39.3	46.0	37.7	38.1	38.1
None of the above	8.0	8.1	6.7	7.5	7.9	8.2

(a) Tried at least once in lifetime.

(b) Used at least once in lifetime.

(c) For non-medical purposes.

(d) Non-maintenance.

(e) This category included substances known as 'Designer drugs' before 2004.

(f) This category did not include buprenorphine before 2007.

Notes

1. For tobacco, 1998, 2001, 2004 and 2007 figures represent proportions, of the population, that have smoked more than 100 cigarettes in their lifetime.

2. For alcohol, figures represent proportions of the population who have consumed a full serve of alcohol.

Difference between 2004 result and 2007 result is statistically significantly (2-tailed $\alpha = 0.05$).

- In 2007, 44.6% Australians aged 14 years or older had smoked at least 100 cigarettes or the equivalent amount of tobacco in their lifetime, declining from the proportion in 2004 (47.1%).
- In 2007, nine out of every ten (89.9%) people had consumed a full serve of alcohol in their lifetime.
- Marijuana/cannabis had been used at least once by one-third of Australians aged 14 years or older in 2007 (33.5%).
- Over one-third of the population of Australians aged 14 years or older had ever used any illicit drug (38.1%) in 2007.

Age of initiation—ever used

The mean ages at which Australians first used most licit and illicit drugs have changed very little between 1995 and 2007 (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Mean age of initiation^(a) of lifetime drug use, Australia, 1995 to 2007

Drug/behaviour	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007
			(years)		
Tobacco	15.6	15.7	15.5	15.9	15.8
Alcohol	17.3	17.1	17.1	17.2	17.0
Illicits					
Marijuana/cannabis	19.1	18.7	18.5	18.7	18.8
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(b)	19.0	19.7	18.9	23.4	20.9
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(b)	23.8	23.4	22.8	25.2	25.7
Steroids ^(b)	18.7	21.6	22.5	25.2	23.9
Barbiturates ^(b)	18.2	19.7	18.7	19.6	19.6
Inhalants	16.1	17.5	17.6	18.6	19.3
Heroin	20.6	21.5	20.7	21.2	21.9
Methadone ^(c) or Buprenorphine ^(e)	n.a.	21.6	21.8	24.8	23.3
Meth/amphetamine ^(b)	20.2	19.9	20.4	20.8	20.9
Cocaine	21.1	22.3	22.6	23.5	23.1
Hallucinogens	19.1	18.8	19.1	19.5	19.6
Ecstasy ^(d)	22.7	22.7	21.9	22.8	22.6
Ketamine	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	23.7	24.0
GHB	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	23.7	24.6
Injected drugs	n.a.	20.7	20.2	21.7	21.3
<i>Any illicit</i>	18.9	18.8	18.6	19.4	19.1

(a) Age first tried/used drug.

(b) For non-medical purposes.

(c) Non-maintenance.

(d) This category included substances known as 'Designer drugs' before 2004.

(e) This category did not include buprenorphine before 2007.

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- For tobacco and alcohol, the mean ages of initiation remained relatively stable between 1995 and 2007 at around 16 years of age for tobacco and 17 years of age for alcohol.
- The mean age of initiation for first use of all illicit substances surveyed either remained stable or changed slightly between 2004 and 2007.

Availability of drugs

Survey respondents were asked whether they had been offered or had the opportunity to use selected drugs in the preceding 12 months (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Offered or had the opportunity to use selected drugs: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Tobacco	58.0	53.7	47.6	44.7	52.8	49.2
Alcohol	92.9	91.5	87.7	87.0	90.3	89.3
Illicits						
Marijuana/cannabis	24.4	20.4	16.8	13.9	20.6	17.1
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	40.9	15.5	41.6	15.3	41.3	15.4
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	6.9	6.2	6.7	5.8	6.8	6.0
Steroids ^(a)	1.1	1.8	0.5	0.9	0.8	1.3
Barbiturates ^(a)	1.0	1.3	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.1
Inhalants	4.0	4.1	2.0	2.3	3.0	3.2
Heroin	1.0	1.1	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9
Meth/amphetamine ^(a)	8.3	6.1	5.4	3.7	6.8	4.9
Cocaine	3.6	4.7	2.6	3.1	3.1	3.9
Naturally occurring hallucinogens	2.6	2.1	1.5	1.5	2.1	1.8
LSD/synthetic hallucinogens	2.9	2.0	1.6	1.3	2.2	1.7
Ecstasy ^(b)	9.7	9.6	6.0	6.6	7.8	8.1
Ketamine	1.9	1.2	1.3	0.8	1.6	1.0
GHB	1.5	0.9	0.9	0.7	1.2	0.8
Kava	2.5	2.3	1.6	1.3	2.0	1.8

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) This category included substances known as 'Designer drugs' before 2004.

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- One in two Australians (49.2%) aged 14 years or older had been offered or had tobacco available for use, whereas nine in ten (89.3%) had been offered or had alcohol available for use.
- Between 2004 and 2007, the availability of licit drugs declined; more so for tobacco (from 52.8% to 49.2%) than for alcohol (from 90.3% to 89.3%).
- Approximately one-sixth (17.1%) of the population were offered or had the opportunity to use marijuana/cannabis. The proportion with access to marijuana/cannabis was lower than in 2004 (20.6%).
- The availability of pain-killers/analgesics (both prescription and over-the-counter) for non-medical purposes decreased substantially from 41.3% in 2004 to 15.4% in 2007. The availability of all other illicit drugs surveyed remained stable or changed little for this period.

Drugs thought to be associated with a drug ‘problem’

Respondents were asked to name the drug they thought of when people talked about a drug ‘problem’. In 2007, heroin, marijuana/cannabis and meth/amphetamine were the drugs most commonly associated with a drug problem (Table 2.5).

Table 2.5: Drug first nominated^(a) when asked about a ‘drug problem’: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug first nominated	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Tobacco	4.1	3.3	2.5	2.0	3.3	2.6
Alcohol	10.2	10.8	9.8	10.2	10.0	10.5
Marijuana/cannabis	29.3	25.8	29.1	24.6	29.2	25.2
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(b)	0.4	0.2	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.4
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(b)	0.3	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.3
Steroids ^(b)	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3
Barbiturates ^(b)	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.2
Inhalants	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
Heroin	39.7	29.7	39.1	30.9	39.4	30.3
Meth/amphetamine ^(b)	5.2	16.0	5.8	16.8	5.5	16.4
Cocaine	6.3	7.2	7.2	7.1	6.7	7.1
Naturally occurring hallucinogens	—	—	0.1	—	0.1	—
LSD/synthetic hallucinogens	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Ecstasy ^(c)	2.2	3.7	2.9	4.7	2.6	4.2
GHB	—	0.1	—	0.1	—	0.1
Ketamine	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kava	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tea/coffee/caffeine	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3
Drugs other than listed	—	0.2	0.1	0.2	—	0.2
None/can't think of any	0.5	1.0	0.7	1.2	0.6	1.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Respondents were allowed to nominate up to two drugs and ‘problems’, but only the first mentioned drug is shown here.

(b) For non-medical purposes.

(c) This category included substances known as ‘Designer drugs’ before 2004.

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

Of the drugs ‘first thought of’ as associated with a drug ‘problem’:

- The proportion of persons nominating heroin decreased from 39.4% in 2004 to 30.3% in 2007.
- Marijuana/cannabis was nominated by 25.2% of respondents in 2007; a decrease over the proportion in 2004 (29.2%).
- The proportion of persons nominating meth/amphetamine increased markedly from 5.5% in 2004 to 16.4% in 2007.

Acceptability of drug use

Respondents were asked if they personally approved or disapproved of the regular use by adults of various drugs. In 2007, answers to this question were categorised as 'strongly approve', 'approve', 'neither approve nor disapprove', 'disapprove', 'strongly disapprove', or 'don't know enough to say'. In earlier surveys, the categories were limited to 'approve' and 'disapprove'. The 2007 results are for those respondents who said they 'strongly approve' or 'approve' the use of drugs by adults (shown together as 'approve') and for those who neither approved nor disapproved. Despite the difficulty of comparison, the 2004 results for persons who said they 'approve' are shown.

In 2007, 45.2% of Australians aged 14 years or older 'strongly approved' or 'approved' the use of alcohol by adults (Table 2.6). The corresponding figure for tobacco was 14.3%. For illicit drugs, less than 5% of Australians in 2007 thought that regular use by adults was acceptable, with the exceptions of pain-killers (6.6%) and marijuana (10.4%).

Table 2.6: Approval of regular drug use by adults: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug	2004		2007				
	Persons	Males		Females		Persons	
	Approve	Approve	Neither ^(a)	Approve	Neither ^(a)	Approve	Neither ^(a)
	(per cent)						
Tobacco	39.3	15.8	23.2	12.9	21.9	14.3	22.5
Alcohol	77.0	51.7	32.0	38.9	35.5	45.2	33.8
Marijuana/cannabis	23.2	8.7	18.8	4.6	15.1	6.6	16.9
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(b)	8.0	11.5	14.9	9.4	11.8	10.4	13.3
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(b)	5.0	4.8	14.7	3.4	11.2	4.1	12.9
Steroids ^(b)	2.2	2.3	8.7	0.9	5.4	1.6	7.0
Barbiturates ^(b)	1.2	1.3	7.3	0.8	4.5	1.0	5.9
Inhalants	0.8	1.0	2.2	0.7	1.7	0.8	2.0
Heroin	0.9	1.3	2.6	0.7	1.8	1.0	2.2
Methadone ^(c) or Buprenorphine ^(e)	1.1	1.1	4.2	1.0	3.0	1.0	3.6
Meth/amphetamine ^(b)	3.1	1.5	3.2	0.9	2.1	1.2	2.7
Cocaine/crack	2.0	1.8	3.7	1.0	2.3	1.4	3.0
Hallucinogens	2.7	2.1	6.3	1.2	3.5	1.7	4.9
Ecstasy ^(d)	4.2	2.5	5.6	1.5	3.5	2.0	4.6
GHB	0.9	0.8	3.6	0.7	2.0	0.7	2.8
Ketamine	1.0	1.1	4.4	0.8	2.5	1.0	3.4

(a) Neither approve nor disapprove.

(b) For non-medical purposes.

(c) Non-maintenance.

(d) This category included substances known as 'Designer drugs' before 2004.

(e) This category did not include buprenorphine before 2007.

Notes

1 The 2004 and 2007 results shown in the table are not comparable. See text for explanation.

2 Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- For all drugs, in 2007, approval of their regular use by adults was greater among males than females.

Support for the legalisation of illicit drugs

Support for the legalisation of illicit drugs declined slightly between 2004 and 2007 (Table 2.7). A question about support for the legalisation of ecstasy was included for the first time in the 2007 questionnaire.

Table 2.7: Support^(a) for the personal use of selected drugs being made legal: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Marijuana/cannabis	29.6	23.8	24.4	18.5	27.0	21.2
Heroin	5.5	5.8	4.4	4.6	5.0	5.2
Meth/amphetamine	5.5	5.4	3.9	3.9	4.7	4.6
Cocaine	5.4	6.3	3.9	4.5	4.7	5.4
Ecstasy	n.a.	7.1	n.a.	4.8	n.a.	6.0

(a) Support or strongly support (calculations based on those respondents who were informed enough to indicate their level of support).

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- Support for the legalisation of personal use of marijuana/cannabis fell between 2004 and 2007, from 27.0% to 21.2%. Males were more likely than females to support legalisation (in 2007, 23.8% versus 18.5%).
- Support for the legalisation of heroin and cocaine increased between 2004 and 2007. Males were more likely to support legalisation than females.
- A question about legalisation of ecstasy was included for the first time in the 2007 survey, with only 6.0% of Australians supporting this proposal.

Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of illicit drugs

Respondents were asked to consider to what extent they would support or oppose increased penalties for the sale or supply of a selected group of illicit drugs. A question about support for increased penalties for ecstasy was included for the first time in the 2007 questionnaire.

In 2007, large majorities supported an increase in penalties (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8: Support^(a) for increased penalties for the sale or supply of selected illicit drugs: proportion of the population aged 14 years or older, by sex, Australia, 2004, 2007

Drug	Males		Females		Persons	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
	(per cent)					
Marijuana/cannabis	54.2	59.6	62.0	66.4	58.2	63.0
Heroin	85.0	84.3	87.1	85.1	86.0	84.7
Meth/amphetamine	82.0	84.2	85.3	85.2	83.7	84.7
Cocaine	83.0	82.4	86.1	84.2	84.6	83.3
Ecstasy	n.a.	80.5	n.a.	83.6	n.a.	82.1

(a) Support or strongly support (calculations based on those respondents who were informed enough to indicate their level of support).

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- In 2007, there were higher levels of support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of illicit drugs, compared with 2004.
- As in 2004, in 2007 females were more likely than their male counterparts to support increased penalties for sale or supply of drugs. For example in 2007, 66.4% of females supported increased penalties for the sale or supply of marijuana/cannabis compared with 59.6% of males.
- A question on penalties for sale or supply of ecstasy was introduced for the first time in 2007. This proposition was supported by 82.1% of Australians.

Nominal distribution of a drugs budget

Respondents were asked how they would distribute \$100 on education, law enforcement and treatment, for each of a selected list of drugs. In 2007 the question addressed alcohol, tobacco and all illicit drugs, while in 2004 the question addressed alcohol, tobacco and three separate illicit drugs (Table 2.9).

Table 2.9: Preferred distribution of a hypothetical \$100 for reducing the use of selected drugs, Australia, 2004, 2007

Reduction measure	Alcohol		Tobacco		Marijuana/ cannabis	Meth/am- phetamine	Heroin/ cocaine	Illicit drug use
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2004	2004	2007
	(\$)							
Education	40.80	39.80	45.60	43.70	41.70	34.10	31.40	34.00
Treatment	30.50	30.70	30.40	30.90	26.70	24.50	24.70	25.70
Law enforcement	28.70	29.40	24.00	25.40	31.50	41.40	43.90	40.30

Note: Statistical significance testing was not undertaken for this table.

- In 2007, the amounts nominated to be spent on education for tobacco (\$43.70) and alcohol (\$39.80) exceeded the amounts nominated for treatment and for law enforcement.
- For illicit drugs, law enforcement (\$40.30) attracted the largest component of the \$100 budget.