

# **1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey**

**Detailed findings**

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## **Detailed findings**

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Amber Summerill

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# Contents

<b>List of tables.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>xx</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>xxi</b>
<b>1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background.....	1
The National Drug Strategy.....	1
Drug-related harm .....	1
About the 1998 survey .....	1
Comparisons with 1995 results .....	2
About this report.....	2
Overview – the status of drug use in 1998 .....	2
Lifetime and recent use of drugs.....	2
Preferred drugs.....	3
Availability of drugs .....	4
<b>2 Use of tobacco.....</b>	<b>6</b>
Smoking status.....	6
Ages of smokers.....	6
Number of cigarettes smoked.....	7
Multiple drugs use with tobacco.....	8
Source of supply of tobacco for under-age smokers .....	9
Correlates of tobacco use.....	10
<b>3 Use of alcohol.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Alcohol drinking status .....	12
Frequency of drinking .....	13
Type of alcohol consumed .....	13
Usual place of alcohol consumption.....	15
Amount of alcohol consumed .....	16
Multiple drugs use with alcohol .....	17

	Source of supply of alcohol for under-age drinkers.....	18
	Correlates of alcohol use .....	19
<b>4</b>	<b>Use of non-medical prescription drugs .....</b>	<b>22</b>
	Prescription drug use for non-medical purposes .....	22
	Multiple drugs use with non-medical prescription drugs .....	23
	Correlates of non-medical prescription drug use .....	24
<b>5</b>	<b>Use of marijuana/cannabis.....</b>	<b>26</b>
	Marijuana/cannabis use.....	26
	Type of marijuana/cannabis and method of consumption .....	27
	Usual place of marijuana/cannabis consumption.....	28
	Frequency of marijuana/cannabis use .....	29
	Source of supply of marijuana/cannabis.....	30
	Multiple drugs use with marijuana/cannabis use .....	31
	Correlates of marijuana/cannabis use .....	32
<b>6</b>	<b>Use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes .....</b>	<b>35</b>
	General use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes.....	35
	Usual place of pain-killers/analgesics consumption .....	36
	Frequency of use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes .....	36
	Sources of supply of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical use .....	37
	Multiple drugs use with pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes .....	37
	Correlates of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes .....	38
<b>7</b>	<b>Use of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes.....</b>	<b>40</b>
	General use of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes.....	40
	Usual place of consumption of tranquillisers/sleeping pills.....	40
	Frequency of use of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes.....	41
	Source of supply of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical use .....	41
	Multiple drugs use with tranquillisers/sleeping pills .....	42
	Correlates of tranquillisers/sleeping pills use for non-medical purposes.....	43
<b>8</b>	<b>Use of amphetamines .....</b>	<b>45</b>
	Lifetime and recent use of amphetamines.....	45
	Types of amphetamines and methods of consumption.....	45

Usual place of consumption of amphetamines .....	46
Frequency of amphetamines use.....	47
Source of supply of amphetamines .....	47
Multiple drugs use with amphetamines .....	48
Correlates of amphetamines use .....	49
<b>9 Use of heroin.....</b>	<b>51</b>
Lifetime and recent use of heroin.....	51
Types of heroin used and methods of consumption.....	51
Usual place of heroin consumption.....	52
Frequency of heroin use .....	53
Source of supply of heroin .....	53
Multiple drugs use with heroin.....	54
Correlates of heroin use.....	54
<b>10 Use of cocaine .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Cocaine use.....	56
Types of cocaine and methods of consumption.....	56
Usual place of cocaine consumption .....	57
Frequency of cocaine use.....	58
Source of supply of cocaine .....	59
Multiple drugs use with cocaine.....	59
Correlates of cocaine use .....	60
<b>11 Use of hallucinogens .....</b>	<b>62</b>
Hallucinogen use.....	62
Type of hallucinogens used .....	62
Usual place of hallucinogen consumption .....	63
Frequency of hallucinogens use.....	63
Source of supply of hallucinogens.....	64
Multiple drugs use with hallucinogens .....	65
Correlates of hallucinogens use .....	66
<b>12 Use of ecstasy/designer drugs.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Ecstasy/designer drugs use.....	68
Usual place of ecstasy/designer drugs consumption.....	68

Frequency of ecstasy/designer drugs use .....	69
Source of supply of ecstasy/designer drugs .....	69
Multiple drugs use with ecstasy/designer drugs.....	70
Correlates of ecstasy/designer drugs use.....	71
<b>13 Use of inhalants.....</b>	<b>73</b>
Inhalants use .....	73
Usual place of inhalants consumption .....	73
Frequency of inhalants use .....	74
Source of supply of inhalants .....	74
Multiple drugs use with inhalants.....	75
Correlates of inhalants use.....	76
<b>14 Use of injecting drugs .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Injecting drug use.....	78
Frequency of injecting drugs .....	79
Multiple drugs use by injecting drug users.....	80
Correlates of injecting drugs.....	80
<b>15 Health and social impact of drug use.....</b>	<b>82</b>
Use of selected substances by pregnant or breastfeeding women .....	82
Activities undertaken while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.....	83
Activities undertaken in order to buy alcohol or drugs .....	84
Incidence of alcohol- and other drug-related violence .....	85
Lost days of school or work.....	90
Physical and mental health status of drug users .....	91
Drug consumption status and contact with health services .....	93
<b>16 Drug avoidance behaviour .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Avoidance of cigarette smoke .....	94
Restrictions on smoking in workplaces or educational institutions .....	94
Effort in quitting smoking.....	95
Encouragement to quit smoking .....	95
Intention to give up smoking .....	96
Alcohol moderation behaviour .....	97
Participation in drug treatment programs.....	98



<b>17</b>	<b>Awareness of drug problems and drug regulations.....</b>	<b>100</b>
	Drugs thought to be causing the most deaths in Australia.....	100
	Likely source of information on health effects of drugs.....	101
	Perceived health risk from passive smoking.....	102
	Health risk from alcohol.....	103
	Awareness of regulations relating to the use of marijuana/cannabis.....	105
	Understanding of the term 'decriminalised'.....	106
<b>18</b>	<b>Community perceptions of drug problems in society.....</b>	<b>108</b>
	Drugs thought to be associated with a 'drug problem'.....	108
	Most serious concern regarding drug use/activity in the community.....	108
	Acceptability of regular use of drugs.....	109
	Opinion on legal status of possession of marijuana/cannabis for personal use.....	110
	Potential consumption rate of marijuana/cannabis if it was legal to use.....	113
	Preferred resource allocation to reduce the use of various drugs.....	113
<b>19</b>	<b>Community support for drug-related policy.....</b>	<b>115</b>
	Measures against tobacco use.....	115
	Measures against alcohol use.....	115
	Measures against heroin use.....	116
	Support for legalising drugs for personal use.....	117
	Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of drugs.....	117
	<b>References.....</b>	<b>119</b>
	<b>Appendix 1: Relative standard errors.....</b>	<b>120</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Definition, measurement and distribution of correlates.....</b>	<b>121</b>

# List of tables

Table 1.1:	Summary of drug use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over and mean age of initiation, Australia, 1998 .....	3
Table 1.2:	Preferred drugs of choice: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	4
Table 1.3:	Availability of drugs in the past 12 months: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	4
Table 1.4:	Availability of drugs in the past 12 months: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	5
Table 2.1:	Tobacco smoking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	6
Table 2.2:	Number of cigarettes: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by smoking status and sex, Australia, 1998.....	7
Table 2.3:	Number of cigarettes: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by smoking status and age, Australia, 1998 .....	7
Table 2.4:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent tobacco smokers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	8
Table 2.5:	Polydrug use, proportion of recent tobacco smokers aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	8
Table 2.6:	First and recent source of supply for under-age smokers: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	9
Table 2.7:	Correlates of tobacco use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	11
Table 3.1:	Alcohol drinking status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	12
Table 3.2:	Frequency of drinking: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	13
Table 3.3:	Type of alcohol consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	14
Table 3.4:	Where alcohol is usually consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	16
Table 3.5:	Amount of alcohol usually consumed: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	17
Table 3.6:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	18

Table 3.7:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	18
Table 3.8:	First and recent source of supply for recent drinkers, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	19
Table 3.9:	Correlates of alcohol use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	21
Table 4.1:	Prescription drugs ever used for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	22
Table 4.2:	Prescription drugs recently used for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 ...	23
Table 4.3:	Other drugs used by persons who have recently used prescription drugs for non-medical purposes: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	24
Table 4.4:	Correlates of use of prescription drugs for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	25
Table 5.1:	Marijuana/cannabis use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	26
Table 5.2:	Type of marijuana/cannabis used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	27
Table 5.3:	Type of marijuana/cannabis used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	28
Table 5.4:	Where marijuana/cannabis is usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	29
Table 5.5:	Frequency of marijuana/cannabis use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	30
Table 5.6:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have tried marijuana/cannabis aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	30
Table 5.7:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users of marijuana/ cannabis aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	31
Table 5.8:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent marijuana/cannabis users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	32
Table 5.9:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent marijuana/cannabis users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	32
Table 5.10:	Correlates of marijuana/cannabis use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	34

Table 6.1:	Lifetime and recent use of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	35
Table 6.2:	Where pain-killers/analgesics used for non-medical purposes are usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	36
Table 6.3:	Frequency of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	36
Table 6.4:	First supplier: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who have ever tried pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	37
Table 6.5:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 ...	37
Table 6.6:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	38
Table 6.7:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent users of pain-killers/analgesics for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	38
Table 6.8:	Correlates of pain-killers/analgesics use for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	39
Table 7.1:	Lifetime and recent use of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	40
Table 7.2:	Where tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes are usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	41
Table 7.3:	Frequency of tranquillisers/sleeping pills use for non-medical purposes: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	41
Table 7.4:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever used tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	42
Table 7.5:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	42
Table 7.6:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent users of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 ...	43

Table 7.7:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent users of tranquillisers/sleeping pills for non-medical purposes aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	43
Table 7.8:	Correlates of tranquillisers/sleeping pills use for non-medical purposes: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	44
Table 8.1:	Lifetime and recent use of amphetamines: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	45
Table 8.2:	Type of amphetamines used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	46
Table 8.3:	Type of amphetamines used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	46
Table 8.4:	Where amphetamines usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	46
Table 8.5:	Frequency of amphetamines use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	47
Table 8.6:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever tried amphetamines aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	48
Table 8.7:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent amphetamine users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	48
Table 8.8:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent amphetamine users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	48
Table 8.9:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent amphetamine users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	49
Table 8.10:	Correlates of amphetamines use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	50
Table 9.1:	Lifetime and recent use of heroin: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	51
Table 9.2:	Type of heroin used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	52
Table 9.3:	Type of heroin used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	52
Table 9.4:	Where heroin usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	52
Table 9.5:	Frequency of heroin use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	53
Table 9.6:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever tried heroin aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	53

Table 9.7:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	53
Table 9.8:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent heroin users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	54
Table 9.9:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent heroin users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	54
Table 9.10:	Correlates of heroin use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	55
Table 10.1:	Lifetime and recent use of cocaine: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	56
Table 10.2:	Type of cocaine used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	57
Table 10.3:	Types of cocaine used and method of consumption: proportion of recent users, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	57
Table 10.4:	Where cocaine usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	58
Table 10.5:	Frequency of cocaine use, proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	58
Table 10.6:	First supplier: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who have ever used cocaine, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	59
Table 10.7:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent cocaine users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	59
Table 10.8:	Polydrug use: proportion of cocaine recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	60
Table 10.9:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	60
Table 10.10:	Correlates of cocaine use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	61
Table 11.1	Lifetime and recent use of hallucinogens: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	62
Table 11.2:	Type of hallucinogens used: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	63
Table 11.3:	Where hallucinogens usually consumed, proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	63
Table 11.4:	Frequency of use: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who have recently used naturally-occurring hallucinogens, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	64

Table 11.5:	Frequency of use: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who have recently used synthetic hallucinogens, by age, Australia, 1998.....	64
Table 11.6:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever used hallucinogens, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	65
Table 11.7:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent hallucinogens users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	65
Table 11.8:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent hallucinogens users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	66
Table 11.9:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent hallucinogens users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	66
Table 11.10:	Correlates of hallucinogen use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	67
Table 12.1:	Lifetime and recent use of ecstasy: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	68
Table 12.2:	Where ecstasy/designer drugs usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	69
Table 12.3:	Frequency of ecstasy/designer drugs use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998 .....	69
Table 12.4:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever used ecstasy aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	69
Table 12.5:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent users of ecstasy/designer drugs aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	70
Table 12.6:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent users of ecstasy/designer drugs aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	70
Table 12.7:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent users of ecstasy/designer drugs aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	71
Table 12.8:	Correlates of ecstasy/designer drugs use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	72
Table 13.1:	Lifetime and recent use of inhalants, proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	73
Table 13.2:	Where inhalants usually consumed: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	74
Table 13.3:	Frequency of inhalants use: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	74
Table 13.4:	First supplier: proportion of persons who have ever used inhalants, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	74
Table 13.5:	Recent suppliers: proportion of recent inhalants users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	75

Table 13.6:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent inhalants users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	75
Table 13.7:	Concurrent polydrug use: proportion of recent inhalants users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	76
Table 13.8:	Correlates of inhalants use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	77
Table 14.1:	Lifetime and recent injecting drug use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	78
Table 14.2:	Drugs first and recently injected: proportion of injecting drugs users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	79
Table 14.3:	Frequency of injecting drugs: proportion of recent injecting drug users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	79
Table 14.4:	Polydrug use: proportion of recent injecting drug users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	80
Table 14.5:	Correlates of injecting behaviour: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	81
Table 15.1:	Proportion of pregnant and/or breastfeeding women who recently used selected substances, Australia, 1998 .....	82
Table 15.2:	Activities engaged in while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs in the preceding 12 months: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	83
Table 15.3:	Activities engaged in while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs in the preceding 12 months: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	84
Table 15.4:	Activities undertaken in order to buy alcohol or other drugs: proportion of recent users aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998 .....	85
Table 15.5:	Victims of alcohol- and other drug-related incidents: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	85
Table 15.6:	Victims of alcohol- and other drug-related incidents: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age, Australia, 1998.....	86
Table 15.7:	Location of alcohol- or other drug-related incident: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	87
Table 15.8:	Person(s) alleged responsible for alcohol- or other drug-related incident: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	88
Table 15.9:	Most serious injury sustained as a result of an alcohol- or other drug-related incident: proportion of injured persons aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	89



Table 15.10:	Incidents reported to police: proportion of victims of alcohol- or other drug-related incidents aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	89
Table 15.11:	Reason why all or some incidents not reported to police: proportion of victims of alcohol- or other drug-related incidents aged 14 years and over who did not report the incident, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	90
Table 15.12:	Concomitant alcohol or other drug consumption by victim at time of incident: proportion of victims of alcohol- or other drug-related incidents aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	90
Table 15.13:	Persons who missed days of work or study in the preceding three months due to personal use of alcohol or other drugs: proportion of persons aged 14 years and over who were working or studying, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	91
Table 15.14:	Mean physical and mental health measures by consumption status: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998.....	92
Table 15.15:	Contact with health services: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by consumption status, Australia, 1998 .....	93
Table 16.1:	Non-smokers' avoidance of places where they may be exposed to other people's cigarette smoke: proportion of persons, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	94
Table 16.2:	Non-smoking policies or restrictions in workplaces, schools or colleges: proportion of persons working or studying aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	95
Table 16.3:	Activities related to quitting smoking: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	95
Table 16.4:	Co-residents' encouragement to quit smoking: proportion of recent smokers living with others, aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	96
Table 16.5:	Intention to give up smoking: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	96
Table 16.6:	Actual attempts at giving up smoking in the past 12 months: proportion of recent smokers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	97
Table 16.7:	Alcohol moderation behaviour: proportion of recent drinkers aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	98
Table 16.8:	Participation in alcohol or other drug treatment programs: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	99
Table 17.1:	Drugs thought to cause the most deaths in Australia: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	101

Table 17.2:	Nominated likely source of information on the health effects of alcohol and other drugs: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	102
Table 17.3:	Perceived health risk from passive smoking: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	103
Table 17.4:	Correct identification of the recommended number of standard drinks per day: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998.....	104
Table 17.5:	Knowledge that numbers of standard drinks are shown on cans and bottles of alcoholic beverages: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	105
Table 17.6:	Knowledge of legal status of marijuana/cannabis activities: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	106
Table 17.7:	Understanding of the term 'decriminalised': proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	107
Table 18.1:	Drugs associated with a drug problem: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	108
Table 18.2:	Drug use/activity that is the most serious concern for the general community: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	109
Table 18.3:	Acceptability of regular use of drugs by an adult: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	110
Table 18.4:	Preferred legal status of possession of small quantities of marijuana/cannabis for personal use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	111
Table 18.5:	Preference for criminality of possession of a small quantity of marijuana/cannabis for personal use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	111
Table 18.6:	Preferred penalty for possession of small quantities of marijuana/cannabis for personal use, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	112
Table 18.7:	Expected rate of consumption of marijuana/cannabis if it was legal to use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	113
Table 18.8:	Hypothetical allocation of \$100 to reduce the use of various drugs, by sex, Australia, 1998 .....	114
Table 19.1:	Support for measures to reduce tobacco-related harm: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	115
Table 19.2:	Support for measures to reduce alcohol-related harm: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	116

Table 19.3:	Support for measures to reduce heroin-related harm: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998.....	116
Table 19.4:	Support for personal use of selected drugs being made legal: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .	117
Table 19.5:	Support for increased penalties for the sale or supply of drugs: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998 .....	118
Table A1.1:	Prevalence (P) and relative standard errors (RSE) for different age and sex groups, Australia, 1998.....	120
Table A2.1:	Definition of correlate variables, Australia, 1998 .....	121
Table A2.2:	Sample distribution of correlate variables, Australia, 1998 .....	122

# Preface

This report contains final results from the 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey. Provisional results were published by the Institute as *1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: First Results*. The purpose of this report is twofold: firstly to provide final results of the analysis in *First Results* and secondly to extend the analysis on correlates of drug use and the social and health effects of drug use.

The Institute managed the conduct of the survey on behalf of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, and custody of the survey data set rests with the Institute and is protected by the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Act 1987*. Access to a public-use data set is available through the Social Science Data Archives at the Australian National University, with access to the Institute's data set possible following consideration of research proposals by the Institute's Health Ethics Committee.

# Summary

## The 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Between June and September 1998, 10,030 Australians aged 14 years and older participated in the National Drug Strategy Household Survey. This was the sixth survey in a series which commenced in 1985 but the first to be managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of drugs, their attitudes towards drugs, their drug consumption histories, and related behaviours.

## General findings

### Tobacco

Tobacco was primarily associated with a drug 'problem' by fewer than one in 20 Australians; two in every five approved of the regular use of tobacco by adults. Two-thirds of Australians had tried tobacco at some time in their lives, and more than one in four were recent smokers.

One in seven persons indicated that tobacco was their first drug of choice, and the proportion recently smoking daily or most days declined by two percentage points between 1995 and 1998 to 22%. The average age at which smokers took up tobacco increased from 15.6 to 15.8 years in the same period. Under-age smokers (that is, persons aged under 18 years, to whom it is illegal to sell tobacco products) were likely to have been introduced to smoking by friends and acquaintances. Subsequently, two out of every five under-age smokers obtained their cigarettes from retail outlets. Further, of those teenage recent smokers, nearly 96% also reported using alcohol recently and 76% using marijuana/cannabis recently.

Of persons aged 40–49 years who had ever smoked, 60% no longer did so.

### Alcohol

About one in every seven Australians primarily associated alcohol with a drug 'problem'; three in every five approved of the regular use of alcohol by adults. Nine out of every ten Australians had tried alcohol at some time in their lives and three-quarters had recently consumed alcohol.

Two in every five persons nominated alcohol as their first drug of choice, and the proportion drinking regularly increased from 44% to 49% between 1995 and 1998. One in four persons consumed alcohol daily or on most days in a week, and two in five consumed less often than weekly. Under-age alcohol drinkers (that is, persons aged under 18, to whom it is illegal to

sell alcohol) were likely to have been introduced to drinking by relatives. Subsequently, almost one in every five under-age drinkers obtained their alcohol from retail outlets.

One in six persons admitted to driving a motor vehicle, one in ten verbally abused someone, and one in 50 persons physically abused someone while under the influence of alcohol.

Three in every ten persons had been verbally abused and one in every 16 had been physically abused by someone who had been affected by alcohol.

In terms of alcohol-moderation behaviour by recent drinkers, the most frequently cited activity to moderate the consumption of alcohol was to reduce the amount of alcohol usually consumed (29%).

## **Illicit drugs**

More than three in every four Australians primarily associated an illicit drug with a drug 'problem'; one in four approved the regular use of marijuana by adults, and fewer than one in 20 persons approved the regular use of each of the other illicit drugs included in the survey. Almost one in every two Australians had used an illicit drug at some time in their lives and over one in five had used illicit drugs in the previous 12 months. One in every two persons supported measures designed to reduce harm associated with illicit drug use.

Around one in 14 persons nominated any illicit drug as their first drug of choice, with one in 18 nominating marijuana/cannabis as first choice. The average age at which people first tried illicit drugs declined slightly from 16.8 years in 1995 to 16.6 years in 1998.

Four in every five illicit drug users were introduced to illicit drugs by friends and acquaintances. Subsequently, most illicit drug users continued to obtain their illicit drugs from friends and acquaintances.

One in 16 persons drove a motor vehicle, one in 50 verbally abused someone, and one in 200 physically abused someone while under the influence of illicit drugs. One in ten persons were verbally abused and one in 40 were physically abused by someone affected by illicit drugs.

## **Correlates of drugs use**

The survey showed that the following appear to influence drug use:

- socioeconomic characteristics such as education, employment, occupational status and cultural background;
- geographical variables such as rural/remote location and the index of socioeconomic status of an area; and
- demographic variables such as marital status.

In general, the survey showed that unemployed persons, persons with low educational qualifications, persons working in blue collar jobs, and persons who were never married were more likely than others to be using drugs.