

14 Use of injecting drugs

Injecting drug use

The 1998 survey estimated that 0.8% of all Australians aged 14 years and over injected drugs (Table 14.1). Males were nearly three times (1.1%) more likely to inject drugs compared with females (0.4%).

When the respondents were asked to name the drug they had first injected in their life, more than half (52%) reported first injecting amphetamines, followed by heroin (36%) (Table 14.2). However, when recent injecting drug users (those who had injected drugs in the preceding 12 months) were asked about the type of drugs they injected, nearly three-quarters (72%) reported injecting amphetamines, half (50%) reported injecting heroin, and more than one in ten (11%) reported injecting cocaine.

Table 14.1: Lifetime and recent injecting drug use: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, by age and sex, Australia, 1998

Age	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Males		
14–19	0.7	0.3 *
20–29	6.8	3.3
30–39	4.2	1.1
40+	1.3	0.4 *
All ages	2.9	1.1
Females		
14–19	2.5	1.2
20–29	2.8	1.1
30–39	1.8	0.3
40+	0.3 *	—
All ages	1.3	0.4
Persons		
14–19	1.6	0.7
20–29	4.8	2.2
30–39	3.0	0.7
40+	0.8	0.2 *
All ages	2.1	0.8

Table 14.2: Drugs first and recently injected: proportion of injecting drugs users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Drug first injected^(a)	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Heroin	32.9	42.7	35.9
Methadone	1.6 *	—	1.1 *
Other opiates	3.4 *	0.6 *	2.5 *
Amphetamines	55.4	44.0	52.0
Cocaine	1.6 *	2.8 *	2.0 *
Hallucinogens	0.1 *	—	—
Ecstasy/designer drugs	1.0 *	—	0.7 *
Benzodiazepines	—	—	—
Steroids	3.6 *	—	2.5 *
Other drugs	0.6 *	9.9	3.4 *
Drugs injected last 12 months^(b)			
Heroin	52.6	41.0	49.6
Methadone	10.0 *	—	7.4 *
Other opiates	5.5 *	—	4.1 *
Amphetamines	69.5	77.4	71.6
Cocaine	7.3 *	22.4	11.2 *
Hallucinogens	5.2 *	—	3.8 *
Ecstasy/designer drugs	6.5 *	2.4 *	5.5 *
Benzodiazepines	5.2 *	—	3.8 *
Steroids	7.0 *	—	5.2 *
Other drugs	3.9 *	6.8 *	4.6 *

(a) Base equals all respondents who have injected.

(b) Base equals all recent injecting drug users.

Frequency of injecting drugs

The 1998 survey showed that, of all the recent injecting drugs users, the majority (69%) injected once a week or less, while about one in ten (10%) injected twice or more a day. The survey also showed that:

- Male injecting drug users injected more often, with one in five (22%) injecting at least once a day compared with females (17%).
- Three-quarters (76%) of female injecting drug users injected at most once a week compared with two-thirds (66%) of male injecting drug users.

Table 14.3: Frequency of injecting drugs: proportion of recent injecting drug users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Frequency	Males	Females	Persons
		(per cent)	
Once a week or less	66.0	75.8	68.5
More than once a week but less than daily	12.5 *	7.2 *	11.1 *
Once a day	11.9 *	5.2 *	10.1 *
2–3 times daily	8.0 *	11.9 *	9.0 *
More than 3 times daily	1.7 *	—	1.3 *

Note: Base equals all recent injecting drug users.

Multiple drugs use by injecting drug users

Of those who injected drugs in 1998, a majority also reported using other drugs. For example, 96% of injecting drug users also consumed alcohol, 92% used marijuana/cannabis, and 80% used tobacco.

Table 14.4: Polydrug use: proportion of recent injecting drug users aged 14 years and over, by sex, Australia, 1998

Other substances recently used	Males	Females (per cent)	Persons
Alcohol	96.5	92.6	95.5
Tobacco	82.0	74.6	80.0
Marijuana/cannabis	95.3	84.4	92.4
Pain-killers/analgesics ^(a)	48.3	45.7	47.6
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills ^(a)	37.9	35.9	37.3
Steroids ^(a)	7.2 *	5.4 *	6.7 *
Barbiturates ^(a)	17.5 *	11.3 *	15.8
Amphetamines ^(a)	75.5	92.2	80.0
Heroin	63.9	42.2	58.2
Methadone ^(b)	22.3 *	5.3 *	17.8
Cocaine	23.3 *	31.7	25.5
Hallucinogens	36.6	46.5	39.3
Ecstasy/designer drugs	27.2	37.4	29.8
Inhalants	8.2 *	15.3	10.1 *

(a) For non-medical purposes.

(b) Non-maintenance.

Note: Base equals all recent injecting drug users.

Correlates of injecting drugs

The 1998 survey showed that injecting behaviour among drug users was fairly evenly spread, except among unemployed drug users, who have a higher proportion of injecting drug users (5%) compared with other groups. The data showed that:

- Persons born in Australia (0.8%) and those born in other English-speaking countries (0.9%) were more likely to inject drugs compared with persons born in non-English-speaking countries (0.2%).
- Persons living in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (1st quintile) were more likely to inject drugs compared with persons living in less disadvantaged areas (2nd–5th quintiles).
- Persons who were never married were more likely to inject drugs compared with persons who were either married or divorced.
- Persons employed in blue collar jobs were more likely to inject drugs compared to persons employed in higher status jobs.

Table 14.5: Correlates of injecting behaviour: proportion of the population aged 14 years and over, Australia, 1998

Characteristics	Never used	Lifetime use (per cent)	Recent use
Education			
No qualification	97.5	2.5	1.0
HSC or equivalent	97.7	2.3	0.7
Trade/diploma	97.8	2.2	0.7
Tertiary	98.8	1.2	0.3 *
Employment status			
Currently employed	97.8	2.2	0.7
Student	98.6	1.4	0.4 *
Unemployed	90.0	10.0	5.1
Retired/pension	99.0	1.0	0.3 *
Occupational status			
Upper (white)	98.5	1.5	0.5
Middle	97.9	2.1	0.9
Lower (blue)	96.9	3.1	1.0
Country of birth			
Australian born	97.8	2.3	0.8
Other English-speaking born	97.4	2.6	0.9 *
Non-English-speaking born	99.4	0.6 *	0.2 *
Socioeconomic area			
1st quintile	97.8	2.2	1.1
2nd quintile	97.4	2.6	1.0
3rd quintile	98.6	1.4	0.5
4th quintile	97.9	2.1	0.4
5th quintile	98.0	2.0	0.8
Geography			
Urban	97.8	2.2	0.8
Rural/remote	98.1	1.9	0.7
Marital status			
Never married	95.7	4.3	2.3
Widowed	99.5	0.5 *	—
Divorced/separated	98.2	1.8	0.4 *
Presently married	98.8	1.2	0.1 *

Note: Base equals all recent injecting drug users.