

Drug use in Victoria

Apart from cannabis, only a small minority of Australian people use illicit drugs and the majority of these do so for a relatively short period of their life. However, substantial harms are related to the misuse of illicit drugs. These include overdose-related death, involvement in crime, community and family distress, and the transmission of HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases (notably hepatitis C).

While the absolute number of people dying from illicit drugs is not high compared to death related to the use of alcohol and tobacco, the burden of harm is much more substantial if one considers the years of life lost.

There are a number of surveys available that provide information relating to the prevalence of drug use and the characteristics of individuals who use drugs in Victoria and Australia-wide.

Victorian School Students Survey

Selected statistics collated in the Victorian Secondary School Students and Drug Use Survey 2008 include cannabis and other illicit drug use in year 7 to 12 students.

Cannabis (year 7 to 12 students)

- Cannabis was the most commonly used illicit substance among secondary school students.
- Across all 12 to 17-year-olds, 12 per cent stated they had used cannabis in their lifetime, 11 per cent had used it in the past year, 6 per cent in the past month, and 3 per cent in the past week.

Other illicit substances

- 'Lifetime use' of an illicit drug was significantly lower in 2008 compared to all previous survey years for both 12 to 15-year-olds and 16 to 17-year-olds. Between 1996 and 2008, lifetime use of at least one illicit drug declined from 27 per cent to 10 per cent respectively among 12 to 15-year-olds, and from 48 per cent to 24 per cent respectively among the older age group
- Similarly, use of at least one illicit drug in the past month was significantly lower in 2008 than in all other survey years for the younger age group, and significantly lower than 2002 and early among the older age group.

National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Selected statistics collated in the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS) include cannabis and other illicit drug use in people over 14 years.

Cannabis (people over 14 years)

- Cannabis is the most used illicit drug in Australia across all age groups.
- In 2007, over 5.5 million people aged 14 years or older (33.5 per cent) had used cannabis in their lifetime.
- Cannabis use is highest among people aged 20 to 29 years.

Other illicit drugs (people over 14 years)

- Over 3.1 million Australians have used an illicit drug other than cannabis in their lifetime.
- Males are more likely than females to have used an illicit drug.
- People aged 20 to 29 are most likely to have recently used an illicit drug.
- Curiosity was a factor influencing the use of an illicit drug for three in five (60.5 per cent) of those who had ever used an illicit drug, and peer pressure was a factor for 43.3 per cent.
- In 2007, 347,900 Australians aged 14 years or older had used heroin, methadone and/or other opioids in their lifetime, and about 57,000 had used these drugs in the past 12 months.
- Of the recent (last 12 months) users of meth/amphetamines, the most common frequency of use was once or twice a year (37.7 per cent of recent users).

Drug market

Understanding the influence of key aspects of the drug market such as the price, purity and availability of illicit drugs is an important part of monitoring trends of illicit drug use and harms in the community.

Illicit Drug Reporting System

Selected statistics for Victoria from the Illicit Drug Reporting System 2009 include:

- The price of heroin per gram in 1997 was \$450. This decreased to \$300 in 2000 and increased to \$450 per gram in 2001. In 2010, it had decreased to \$310.
- The mean purity level of heroin seizures increased from 35 per cent in 1996–97 to 62 per cent in 1997–98, then decreased to 46 per cent in 2001. In 2010, the median purity level had further decreased to 26.5 per cent.
- Findings from 2010 indicate changing patterns of methamphetamine use, with a continuing decline in the prevalence of reported recent crystal methamphetamine use. These changes are likely to be reflective of decreasing purity and availability of these drugs.
- In 2010, the median price of methamphetamine was \$200 per gram, and the price of crystal methamphetamine powder was \$500 per gram.

Drug-related mortality

Numbers of illicit drug-related deaths in Victoria decreased markedly in 2001 and have remained lower ever since.

- **1999** – 257
- **2000** – 312
- **2001** – 93
- **2002** – 111
- **2003** – 156
- **2004** – 108
- **2005** – 101
- **2006** – 89
- **2007** – 85

Blood-borne viruses

In 2007, the (then) Department of Human Services received 159 notifications of newly acquired hepatitis C infections, of which 123 cases (77%) reported injecting drug use as being a risk factor.

There were no new HIV cases in 2010 for which injecting drug use was reported as the only risk factor for exposure to HIV. Numbers in this category are generally low.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- DirectLine Tel. 1800 888 236
- DrugInfo Tel. 1300 85 85 84
- Harm Reduction Victoria (HRV) Tel. (03) 9329 1500

Things to remember

- There have been a number of surveys that provide information about the prevalence of drug use in the Victorian community.
- Hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection among injecting drug users in Victoria is of major concern.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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