

Summary of key findings – Victorian drug statistics handook 2007

Alcohol

The most recent *National Drug Strategy Household Survey* (2004) reports that a third of adults and 64 per cent of all 18 to 24 year olds in Victoria drink at risky or high risk levels for short term harm at least yearly. This is consistent with the increased numbers of alcohol-related inpatient hospitalisations, ambulance attendances and assaults in 2005-06 in Victoria. Alcohol continues to be the most common drug of concern among drug treatment clients in Victoria, making up approximately 40 per cent of all courses of treatment in 2005-06.

Amphetamines, methamphetamines and other stimulants

Most evidence points to methamphetamine use in Australia and Victoria as being relatively stable from 2001 to 2004. Drug treatment clients with amphetamines and other stimulants as primary drugs of concern represent only seven per cent of all courses of treatment or ten per cent of clients in Victoria in 2005-06. Similarly, stimulants-related hospitalisations made up seven per cent of all drug-related hospitalisations in Victoria in 2005-06 although numbers did increase by five per cent over 2004-05 figures. Law enforcement data indicates a 31 per cent increase in arrests for amphetamine-type stimulants in Victoria from 2004-05 to 2005-06, representing the greatest per centage increase of arrests across all drug classes.

Benzodiazepines and other minor tranquillisers

Licit use of benzodiazepines is common in Victoria, but the prevalence of illicit use reported by population surveys is low, accompanied by the low level of benzodiazepine-related courses of treatment for problematic benzodiazepine use. However, other than tobacco and alcohol, benzodiazepines were the next most commonly specified type of drug involved in drug-related hospitalisations in Victoria in 2005-06, with females being over-represented in both benzodiazepine-related ambulance attendances and hospitalisations. These data sets however do not record the licit or illicit nature of how these benzodiazepines were obtained.

Cannabis

Cannabis remains the most commonly used illicit drug in Victoria, although the prevalence of use within the last 12 months declined between 2001 and 2004. Cannabis is the second most common primary drug of concern among drug treatment clients (28 per cent of clients, or 25 per cent of courses of treatment delivered in 2005-06). Hospitalisations attributable to cannabis use increased by one third between 2004-05 and 2005-06, representing nine per cent of all illicit drug hospitalisations. While cannabis-related arrests make up 58 per cent of overall drug arrests in Victoria in 2005-06, this represents a decrease of four per cent from the previous year.

Hallucinogens

The prevalence of hallucinogen use is low in Victoria, parallel with low levels of hallucinogens-related courses of treatment (0.2 per cent), ambulance attendances and hospitalisations.

Heroin and other opioids

The prevalence of heroin use in Victoria remained low in 2005-06, although hospital attendances did increase by four per cent since 2004-05. Heroin was identified as the primary drug of concern in 18 per cent (9,253) of courses of treatment provided by drug treatment services in 2005/06, compared with 22 per cent (10,760) in the previous year. Enrolment in pharmacotherapy programs has stabilised at approximately 10,700 for the past three years. Needle and syringe distribution decreased by 11 per cent from 2005 to 2006. The report of 37 heroin-related deaths in 2006 represented a decrease of 48 per cent on the previous year. Ambulance attendances for heroin overdose showed a downward trend for 2005-06, and opioid-related arrests decreased by 40 per cent compared with the previous year. Heroin continued to be the preferred drug among injecting drug users, "very easy" or "easy" to obtain, and of a "low" or "medium" purity level. In addition, hepatitis C continued to be a major health concern, with 71 per cent of injecting drug use survey respondents testing positive to hepatitis C antibodies, a four per cent increase from 2005. HIV transmission attributable to injecting drug use represented three per cent of new HIV notifications in 2005.

Inhalants

In 2005-06, the prevalence of inhalant use was low in Victoria, parallel with a low level in inhalant-related courses of treatment (approximately 1 per cent), ambulance attendances (2 per cent) and hospitalisations (0.02 per cent).

Steroids

The prevalence of steroid use in Victoria was very low in 2005-06, with consistently less than one per cent of survey respondents reporting lifetime or recent use of steroids. Treatment and morbidity data suggest very little acute harm from steroid use.

Tobacco

Approximately one-fifth of Victorians report regular smoking, with a higher prevalence reported among younger adults. Female secondary school students showed a consistently higher rate of tobacco consumption than their male counterparts. Tobacco consumption accounted for 58 per cent of all drug-related hospitalisations in Victoria in 2005-06, a two per cent increase in the number of admissions from the previous year. Higher admission rates were recorded among males and in rural areas.