wanada
Western Australian Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies

WANADA Question on Notice: Reductions in Illicit Drug Use

Select Committee into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community

As requested by the Select Committee, WANADA has outlined below data regarding trends of reducing illicit drug use in Western Australia.

There are limitations when drawing inferences from the survey data presented below, and concerns have been raised by some data experts regarding wastewater analysis. WANADA encourages the Select Committee to engage with research and data experts to understand the context and constraints of available data.

If the Select Committee requires further information, please contact WANADA at 08 6557 9400.

Trends in Illicit Drug Use: National Drug Strategy Australian Household Survey

According the National Drug Strategy Australian Household Survey 2016, Western Australia has reported a reduction in the percentage of the population reporting recent illicit drug use in Western Australia. This is demonstrating a different trend to comparable national data since 2010.

Recent illicit use of any drug[(a)], people aged 14 years and older, by state/territory, 2001 to 2016 (per cent)

	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2016
Western Australia	21.7	17.3	16.2	18.6	17.0	16.8
Australia	16.7	15.3	13.4	14.7	15.0	15.6

(a) Used at least 1 of 16 illicit drugs in 2016 - the number and type of illicit drug used varied between 1998 and 2016.

(Source: AIHW, National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 State and Territory Chapter Supplementary Data Tables, Table 7.14)

There are evident differences in reported male and female populations re percentage of recent use of illicit drugs.

Recent illicit use of any drug[(a)], people aged 14 years or older, by sex and state/territory, 2010 to 2016 (per cent)

	WA			Australia		
Sex	**2010**	**2013**	**2016**	**2010**	**2013**	**2016**
Males	22.8	21.5	19.1	17.0	18.1	18.3
Females	14.3	12.4	14.4	12.3	12.0	13.0
Persons	18.6	17.0	16.8	14.7	15.0	15.6

(a) Used at least 1 of 16 illicit drugs in 2016 - the number and type of illicit drug used varied between 2010 and 2016.

(Source: AIHW, National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 State and Territory Chapter Supplementary Data Tables, Table 7.15)

There are different trends of recent use of different illicit substances.

Summary of recent[a] drug use, people aged 14 years or older, Western Australia, 2010 to 2016 (per cent)

Risk status	2010	2013	2016
Illicit (excluding pharmaceuticals)			
Cannabis	13.4	11.3	11.6
Ecstasy[b]	3.7	2.6	3.2
Meth/amphetamine[c]	3.4	3.8	2.7
Cocaine	2.2	1.6	1.6
Hallucinogens	1.9	1.9	*0.9#
Inhalants	*0.4	*0.5	*0.6
Heroin	*0.3	*0.3	**0.2
Ketamine	**<0.1	n.p.	**0.2
GHB	**0.1	**0.1	n.p.
Synthetic Cannabinoids	n.a	*2.5	**0.3#
New and Emerging Psychoactive Substances	n.a	*0.5	*0.5
Injected drugs	*0.8	*0.6	*0.6
Any illicit[d] excluding pharmaceuticals	15.4	13.7	13.7
Pharmaceuticals			
Pain-killers/analgesics and opioids[c] (includes OTC[e])	3.7	4.6	n.a
Pain-killers/analgesics and opioids[c] (excludes OTC[e])	n.a	3.3	3.7
Tranquillisers/sleeping pills[c]	2.0	1.8	1.8
Steroids[c]	**0.2	**<0.1	**<0.1
Methadone or Buprenorphine[c]	**<0.1	**<0.1	**0.1
Misuse of pharmaceuticals[f] (includes OTC[e])	5.1	5.6	n.a
Misuse of pharmaceuticals[f] (excludes OTC[e])	n.a	4.5	4.9
Any illicit[f]	18.6	17.0	16.8
None of the above	14.3	15.7	21.9#

* Estimate has a relative standard error of 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

** Estimate has a high level of sampling error (relative standard error of 51% to 90%), meaning that it is unsuitable for most uses.

Statistically significant change between 2013 and 2016.

n.p. not published because of small numbers, confidentiality or other concerns about the quality of the data.

(a) Used in the previous 12 months. For tobacco and alcohol, recent/current use means daily, weekly and less than weekly smokers and drinkers.

(b) Included 'designer drugs' before 2004.

(c) For non-medical purposes.

(d) Illicit use of at least 1 of 12 drugs (excluding pharmaceuticals) in the previous 12 months in 2013. The number and type of drug used varied between 1993 and 2013.

(e) OTC refers to paracetamol, aspirin and other non-opioid over-the-counter pain-killers/analgesics (see *Note* for more details).

(f) Used at least 1 of 16 illicit drugs in 2016 - the number and type of illicit drug used varied between 1998 and 2016.

Note: For years 2001 to 2010, 'Pain-killers/analgesics and opioids' refers to the combined rates from the 'pain-killer/analgesics' and 'other opiates' sections and may include the use of non-opioid over-the-counter (OTC) drugs such as paracetamol and aspirin.

In 2013, a new question was added to the survey and captured the types of prescription and over-the-counter analgesics used allowing the 2013 data to be reanalysed including and excluding non-opioid over-the-counter drugs such as paracetamol and aspirin.

In 2016, pain-killer/analgesics and opioids sections were combined into one section and references and questions about use of non-opioid over-the-counter (OTC) drugs such as paracetamol and aspirin were removed.

While analyses have been undertaken to make the 2013 and 2016 data as comparable as possible, the changes to the 2016 survey has resulted in a break in the time-series for pain-killers and opiates and also for the overall misuse of pharmaceuticals. As the data are no longer comparable, significance testing was not undertaken between 2013 and 2016 for 'pain-killers/analgesics and opioids' or misuse of any pharmaceutical.

(Source: AIHW, National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016 State and Territory Chapter Supplementary Data Tables, Table 7.18.)

It needs to be noted that the statistics above, from the National Drug Strategy Australian Household Survey 2016, relate to the percentage of the population reporting recent use, and is not related to the quantities or purity of the substances.

Wastewater Analysis – Methamphetamine Use in Western Australia

While Western Australia has been reported as having the highest levels of methamphetamine use in Australia (a title that has also been applied previously to South Australia), trends in use are less clear. Of the historical wastewater analysis data available to date, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission notes that Perth data demonstrates short term changes, while a clear trend is yet to emerge.

(Source: Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program – Report 6, December 2018, p41.)

It needs to be noted that wastewater analysis is undertaken in selected sites, and is not state-wide.

Access to Alcohol and Other Drug Services 2017-18

While illicit drug use has reduced, the overall demand for specialist alcohol and other drug services remains high. It is estimated that in 2017/18:

- 18,589 service consumers aged 10 and over sought treatment at 96 specialist alcohol and other drug services in Western Australia;
- 7,686 closed episodes for service consumers with a principal drug of concern of amphetamine type substances were provided in Western Australia; and
- 33.6% of closed episodes in Western Australia listed amphetamine type substances as the principal drug of concern.

(Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2017-18: key findings (web report) Accessed via: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/alcohol-other-drug-treatment-services/aodts-2017-18-key-findings/contents/summary)

It is WANADA's view that any alternative approaches to reducing illicit drug use must be considered within the context of there being insufficient alcohol and other drug services to meet existing and projected demand, as indicated in the *Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025.*