



Home > Media Centre > Fact Sheets > Tough on Drugs

Tough on Drugs

Illicit drugs are used by a significant proportion of the population and are responsible for considerable health, economic and social costs to individuals, families and the community.

Does Australia have a problem with illicit (illegal) drugs?

Illicit drugs are used by a significant proportion of the population and are responsible for considerable health, economic and social costs to individuals, families and the community.

In 2004, about one-third of teenagers (29.3 per cent) had ever used an illicit drug and more than one-fifth (21.3 per cent) had used illicit drugs in the last 12 months. The most recent estimates of the social costs of drug abuse in Australia show that illicit drugs accounted for \$6 billion in costs.

What drugs are being used?

In 2004, cannabis was the most common illicit drug, used by more than 11.3 per cent of over 14-year-olds in the preceding 12 months, followed by ecstasy (3.4 per cent), methamphetamines (speed) (3.2 per cent), painkillers or analgesics for non-medical purposes (3.1 per cent), cocaine (1.0 per cent), hallucinogens (0.7 per cent) and heroin (0.2 per cent).

What dangers are associated with drug use?

Illicit drugs can cause a wide variety of health and social problems, including both short-term and long-term problems and occasionally death.

Cannabis can cause respiratory diseases like bronchitis, psychosis and memory loss. Methamphetamine use is linked to psychosis, aggression, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular and neurological events. Admissions for psychotic episodes due to stimulant use have increased from 200 in 1998-99 to 1,252 in 2000-01.

What is the Australian Government doing to reduce harm caused by illicit drugs?

The National Illicit Drug Strategy - 'Tough on Drugs' - was launched by the Prime Minister in November 1997 and is the largest and most comprehensive anti-drug initiative in Australia. Since its launch, the Australian Government has committed more than \$1 billion to the strategy for measures to reduce the supply of, demand for, and harm caused by drugs, with a further \$439.6 million over four years announced in 2004.

What is the government doing to educate our children about the dangers of drugs?

As part of 'Tough on Drugs', the first phase of the national advertising and education campaign, the National Illicit Drugs Campaign (NIDC) was launched in March 2001, with the aim of

improving parents' communication with 8- to 17-year-olds about illicit drugs. The second part of the NIDC was launched on 17 April 2005, aimed primarily at 13- to 18-year-olds to inform them of the risks of using cannabis, ecstasy and amphetamines.

Has 'Tough on Drugs' been effective?

Fewer people are using illicit drugs since the strategy was launched. The National Drug Strategy Household Surveys have shown a decrease in the number of people who have recently used illicit drugs - from 22 per cent in 1998 to 15.3 per cent in 2004.

Fewer people are dying of overdoses. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported significant reductions in opioid overdose deaths - 1,116 in 1999; 938 in 2000; 386 in 2001; 364 in 2002; and 357 in 2003.

More parents are talking to their children about drugs. Sixty per cent of parents said that the 2001 National Illicit Drug Campaign made it easier for them to talk to their children about drugs, while one in two teenagers said that it made it easier for them to talk to their parents about the subject.

How has treatment of people who take drugs improved?

More people are gaining access to treatment as a result of the government's investment in treatment as an important part of the drug strategy.

The Community Partnerships Initiative provides grants to encourage quality practice and build on community action to prevent illicit drug use across Australia. Since 1997, the government has allocated a total of \$31 million to the initiative.

Another program, the Non Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program provides funds for non-government drug treatment services across Australia to improve outcomes and increase the number of treatment places. More than \$120 million has so far been allocated through this program.

The Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative sets a national approach to keeping minor drug offenders out of prisons. Funding of more than \$340 million has been allocated to this initiative to date. Offenders are diverted to compulsory assessment, treatment and/or education. All states and territories now have diversion programs and more than 70,000 diversions have occurred.

Treatment of people with drug problems and associated health problems is also being improved through the National Psychostimulants and Comorbidity Initiatives to improve the knowledge of health professionals working with affected people.

What are the government's latest initiatives?

In the 2005-06 Budget, the Australian Government announced an additional \$850,000 for the illicit drugs advertising campaign, and an extra \$12 million over two years for grants to non-government organisations which provide treatment and rehabilitation programs for people affected by drugs. This will bring total funds available for the grants program in 2006-07 and 2007-08 to \$44.56 million.

An additional \$8 million over four years was provided for programs to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities reduce use and abuse of drugs and alcohol.

Page last modified: 14 October, 2005