

# Alcohol remains in top position for Australian drugs of concern

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Alcohol continues to be the most common principal drug of concern for clients seeking treatment from publicly funded specialized alcohol and other drug treatment services, a new report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has found.

The Alcohol and other [drug](#) treatment services in Australia [annual report](#) 2019–20, shows around 139,300 Australians aged 10 and over received treatment for [alcohol](#) or other drug use.

"Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in 2019–20, making up one-third (34 percent) of all treatment episodes, followed by amphetamines (28 percent), cannabis (18 percent), and heroin (5 percent). These four drugs accounted for 85 percent of all treatment episodes," said AIHW spokesperson Dr. Gabrielle Phillips.

While alcohol remains the most common principal drug of concern, treatment for amphetamine use has been increasing, with nearly five times as many treatment episodes in 2019–20 than 10 years ago.

From 2015–16 to 2019–20, around 469,000 Australians received treatment for alcohol or drug use from publicly funded treatment services, some having sought treatment in more than one year. Minimizing the harms associated with alcohol, [illicit drug](#) and pharmaceutical [drug use](#) and the response to these harms requires a multifaceted response with clients often receiving multiple episodes of treatment. Around 4 in 10 (44 percent) clients in 2019–20 had previously received treatment from alcohol and other drug treatment services since 2015–16.

Alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern in the older age groups: almost 3 in 5 clients (58 percent) aged 50–59, and over 7 in 10 clients (74 percent) aged 60 and over received treatment for alcohol. The majority of clients receiving alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment services were male (64 percent), and this was the same for those receiving treatment for alcohol use (65 percent male).

Alcohol and other drug treatment services reported changes in [service](#) provision and impacts on usage in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The restrictions caused a number of AOD services to either suspend treatment or operate in new or different ways in 2020.

From March 2020 onwards, specialized treatments provided by AOD services were affected by the introduction of social distancing measures, reducing availability of treatment places. In response, a number of treatment services adapted practices by expanding access to online services and telehealth appointments.

"A range of drug and alcohol treatment services, such as counseling, rehabilitation, information and [education programs](#) and support and case management programs are available to support people regarding their use of alcohol or drugs. Delivery of these services can be provided in a residential treatment facility, non-residential treatment facility, outreach setting or in a home setting," Dr. Phillips said.

Provided by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

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