

More than half the Aussie prison population report a mental health diagnosis

November 14 2023



Credit: RDNE Stock project from Pexels

More than half of prison entrants surveyed for the 6th survey on the health of people in Australian prisons said they had been previously diagnosed with a mental health condition and many reported a family

history of incarceration.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) today [released](#) "The health of people in Australia's prisons 2022," which includes information gathered from 73 of 87 prisons in scope for the survey across Australia (excluding Victoria) to develop a comprehensive view of the health, well-being and [social factors](#) that affect people before, during and after time in prison.

Most prison discharges surveyed for the report were happy with the [health care](#) they received in prison.

"Many people in prison come from disadvantaged backgrounds, with poorer physical and [mental health](#) outcomes than the [general population](#)," said AIHW spokesperson Amanda Donges.

"They are less likely to have accessed [health care services](#) in the community, and more likely to have a history of risky behaviors that can affect health and well-being."

Nearly one-third (31%) of prison entrants had an education level of Year 9 or below. In the 30 days before entering prison, more than 4 in 10 (43%) were homeless, nearly half (46%) were unemployed and 1 in 20 (5.1%) were studying. More than half of surveyed prison entrants (51%) reported a previous diagnosis of a [mental health condition](#), including alcohol and other drug use disorders.

Almost three quarters (73%) of prison entrants reported using illicit drugs at least once during the previous 12 months.

One in four (25%) prison entrants reported that one or more parents or caregivers had been in prison when they were a child. This was more than twice as likely among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First

Nations) entrants (36%) than non-Indigenous entrants (15%). Four in ten (42%) prison entrants aged 18–24 had a parent or caregiver in prison during their childhood.

"The majority of people reported access to a range of health care and other services in prison. Nearly three quarters (72%) of prison discharges rated the health care they received in the prison clinic as good or excellent," Donges said.

"Four in five (80%) reported their [physical health](#) improved or stayed the same while in prison. A similar proportion (81%) reported their mental health improved or stayed the same while in prison."

Adults aged 18–44 in the general community (65%) were about 1.5 times more likely than prison entrants (42%) and prison discharges (41%) of the same age to rate their health as very good or excellent.

First Nations discharges were more likely to rate their physical health as very good or excellent (45%) than non-Indigenous discharges (37%).

Nearly half (48%) of prison discharges expected to be homeless on release from prison, with 45% planning to sleep in short term or emergency accommodation and 2.8% expected to sleep rough. About half (52%) of prison discharges had their own stable accommodation arranged.

There are more than 62,000 receptions into, and releases out of, Australia's prisons each year.

More information: The health of people in Australia's prisons 2022, *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* (2023). [DOI: 10.25816/1md4-5g46](https://doi.org/10.25816/1md4-5g46)

Provided by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Citation: More than half the Aussie prison population report a mental health diagnosis (2023, November 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-11-aussie-prison-population-mental-health.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.