

NON-MEDICAL USE OF PHARMACEUTICALS TRENDS AND AOD TREATMENT IN AUSTRALIA

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Introduction and aims: In Australia, pharmaceutical drugs are readily available to prevent, treat, and cure disease, but the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals has been shown to cause dependence and considerable harms.

The aim of this paper is to highlight the trends in the non-medical use of pharmaceuticals in Australia, prescription and broad treatment patterns as well as evidence of increasing harms.

Design and methods: This paper will present the latest data from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set (AODTS NMDS) and the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS). It will also highlight data from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) administrative data set and explore national drug-induced deaths data.

Key findings: According to the 2016 NDSHS, about 1 million Australians aged 14 years or older recently misused a pharmaceutical drug (excluding non-opioid over-the-counter medicines), while data from the AODTS NMDS showed that the proportion of treatment episodes for prescription opioid analgesics continues to grow. PBS data suggests that substantial and rising numbers of opioid analgesics are being dispensed—particularly oxycodone. Over the past decade, drug-induced deaths were more likely to be due to prescription drugs than illicit drugs; with benzodiazepines and ‘other opioids’ (such as oxycodone and codeine) commonly identified.

Discussions and conclusions: The non-medical use of pharmaceuticals is common in Australia and often associated with illegal drug use; having ongoing implications for the AOD service sector. Further research is required to understand the complex relationship between illegal drug use and non-medical use of pharmaceuticals in order to provide the best treatment options into the future.

Implications for practice or policy: This data will continue to inform government policy and AOD treatment services in Australia.

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