

Estimating the societal cost of heroin dependence in Australia

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Introduction: Opioid use disorder (OUD) is a public health concern in Australia and internationally. High mortality rates, increased risk of physical/mental health comorbidities and increased risk of social issues contribute to a high personal and societal cost. The aim of this paper is to determine the societal cost of heroin dependence Australia-wide and per person who uses heroin.

Method: A longitudinal cohort study of 615 people with heroin dependence were interviewed at five timepoints. Resource use was determined from the interviews and was multiplied by unit costs to estimate the annual healthcare costs, productivity costs and other costs (crime, homelessness, cost of the drug and prison costs). The monetary value of premature mortality was calculated using the value of a statistical life year method.

Results: The annual societal cost of heroin dependence in Australia was A\$165,220/person using heroin. This included healthcare costs (\$16,188), lost productivity costs (A\$23,857) and other costs (A\$125,298). The annual Australia-wide societal cost for heroin dependence was 1.7 billion dollars (CI 1.5billion, 1.8 billion). Crime was the highest cost contributor (52%), followed by heroin drug (20%) and lost productivity (14%). The estimated number of life years lost over the 11-year study period due to heroin dependence equaled 27,732 years lost Australia-wide, which approximates to over 4 billion dollars.

Discussions and Conclusions: The significant societal cost emphasises the importance of providing resources and attention to heroin dependence. The cost of crime and heroin to the individuals contributed to over 70% of the total costs, which highlights the illicit nature of the illness contributes to the high costs to society.

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