

The ageing population of people who inject drugs: Findings from the 2000-2021 Illicit Drug Reporting System.

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Introduction and Aims: In 2020, one in five people attending Needle and Syringe Programs in Australia were aged 50 years or older. Despite calls for specialised interventions and care for older people who inject drugs (PWID), there remains limited research on the characteristics and health needs of this group.

This study aims to examine:

- The proportion of PWID aged 50 years and older, from 2000-2021.
- The demographic, drug use, injecting risk behaviour, and health profile of PWID aged 50 years and older in 2011 and 2021.

Method / Approach: This paper will use data from the 2000-2021 Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS), a national illicit drug surveillance system which includes annual cross-sectional interviews with people who regularly inject drugs. Multivariate logistic regression will be used to identify the characteristics of PWID aged ≥ 50 .

Key Findings: Analysis of IDRS data found that the percentage of PWID aged 50 years and over increased from 0.8% in 2000 to 31% in 2021. While in 2011 older participants reported heroin to be the drug they injected the most often (46%), in 2021 this was reported to be methamphetamine crystal (43%). Key injecting risk behaviours amongst the older 2021 participants was reported to include injecting alone, sharing of injecting equipment, reusing needles, and injection related injuries.

Discussions and Conclusions: Our findings suggests that the IDRS participants are an ageing cohort. The comparison of the characteristics and behaviours of this group over time highlights the changing profile and needs of older PWID. Our findings may inform services in providing targeted care to older PWID.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: AP has received untied educational grants from Seqirus and Mundipharma. RS has received untied educational grants from Seqirus. RB has received untied educational grants from Mundipharma and Indivior. PD is funded by an NHMRC Senior Research Fellowship (1136908). PD has received investigator-driven funding from Gilead Sciences for work connected to hepatitis C treatment and an untied educational from Indivior for work unrelated to this study. He has served as an unpaid member of an Advisory Board for Mundipharma. LD and MF have received untied educational grants from Mundipharma, Indivior and Seqirus.