

3.17 Parental use of alcohol and drugs

Why this measure is included

Parental use of alcohol and drugs can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of children and young people in their care. Issues such as neglect of household tasks and routines, financial difficulties, failure to respond to the emotional needs of children and poor supervision can result from parental alcohol or other drug intoxication or dependence and negatively affect children.²³³

Alcohol or other drug use is a key risk factor for the occurrence of child abuse and neglect requiring intervention by the child protection system.²³⁴

This measure contains data of a different nature than most other data in this report.

Most data of this report meets the following list of stringent criteria:

- Capable, as far as possible, of disaggregation by gender, by Aboriginal status and by region of WA.
- Meaningful for researchers and users and, where possible, young people.
- Based on consistent and repeatable data collections.
- Capable of being influenced by action.

The data in this measure may not meet each of these criteria but has been included in order to provide the best available information regarding this aspect of children and young people's wellbeing. The data should be used with caution, including considering the qualifications outlined within the content of this measure.

What is this measure?

Measures for parental alcohol and drug use are limited. State-level data for Western Australia (WA) is only currently available for parental smoking and has not been published for alcohol or illicit drug use.

Some national data is available for this measure in relation to alcohol and illicit drug use and it meets three of the above criteria.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS)²³⁵ measures alcohol and illicit drug use in Australian households and includes measures on use by household composition.

The NDSHS has been conducted every three years since 1985. The most recent survey with published results was undertaken in 2010. The data reports on alcohol use and illicit drug use in people aged 14 years or older. Data for ages 12 and above is available from 2004 onwards.

The illicit drug use data describes use of a broad range of substances, including prescription medications used for non-medical purposes.

The data is also reported on by social characteristics of survey respondents. The survey incorporates data on household composition that includes categories of 'single person with dependent children' and 'couple with dependent children'.^{236 237}

Data for WA by household composition has not been published.



Information on parental smoking in WA can be derived from the Australian Secondary Students' Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey which has been conducted every three years since 1984. The latest survey was conducted during the 2011 school year. The national report provides estimates of the prevalence of use of different substances in 2011 by males and females of each age between 12 and 17.²³⁸ WA-specific data is prepared and published by the WA Drug and Alcohol Office.²³⁹

In order to differentiate the data included in this measure from data in other measures that meet all selection criteria, the data tables have been placed at the end of the measure.

Commentary

According to the most recent NDSHS, in Australia 18.6 per cent of single parents with dependent children and 19.5 per cent of parents in couple families with dependent children consume alcohol at a level at which the person consuming the alcohol is at increased risk of experiencing alcohol-related disease or injury over their lifetime (Table 3.60).

For single occasion alcohol consumption, 16.9 per cent of Australian single parents with dependent children and 14.3 per cent of parents in couple families with dependent children report they consume alcohol at a rate that increases their immediate risk of alcohol-related harm or injury at least once per week (Table 3.60).

The NDSHS data relating to alcohol consumption in all people 14 years or older is published for WA. The data shows that levels of alcohol consumption in WA that increase risk of injury or disease over a lifetime are higher than the national average (22.7% compared to 20.1%) (Table 3.58).

Similarly, the levels of alcohol consumption that increase risk of injury or disease from a single occasion are higher in WA than nationally (43.3% compared to 39.8%) (Table 3.59). The NDSHS data also revealed that people living in remote or very remote areas were more likely to drink at risky levels than those living in other areas.²⁴⁰ Aboriginal Australians were 1.5 times as likely as non-Aboriginal Australians to drink alcohol at risky levels but Aboriginal Australians were also 1.4 times as likely to abstain from drinking alcohol.²⁴¹

The data on illicit drug use by household composition indicates that in Australia, 20.9 per cent of single parents with dependent children and 10.8 per cent of members of couple families with dependent children had used an illicit drug in the twelve months prior to the most recent NDSHS survey. Additionally, the data indicates that the proportion of single parents who had used an illicit drug in the past year had increased between 2007 and 2010 from 17.7 per cent to 20.9 per cent (Table 3.61) but the increase was not statistically significant.

The NDSHS data relating to illicit drug use in all people aged 14 years or older is published for WA. For illicit drug use in WA the data shows that recent use of illicit drugs is higher in WA than the national average (18.6% compared to 14.7%) and is the second highest rate of use in Australia, after the Northern Territory.²⁴²

Data on the number of children coming into contact with child protection services due to parental alcohol and drug use is not reported by child protection services in Australia however it has been estimated that more than 70 per cent of child protection cases involve excessive parental alcohol consumption.²⁴³

The ASSAD data on smoking in young people aged 12 to 17 years shows that only one-third (33.7%) of young people who live in a household where another person in the home smoked reported they were certain not to smoke. Young people who did not live with another smoker were significantly more likely to say they were certain they would never smoke (66.7%).²⁴⁴

Strategies

The Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015, Government of Western Australia

The Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015 focuses on the strategies required to reduce harms from alcohol and drug use in the Western Australian community. The framework outlines a number of key initiatives that identify the specific needs of children and young people with parents who use alcohol or other drugs. The framework has a number of supporting documents that provide further guidance on specific issues of relevance. Further information is available at www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=538&PortalId=0&TabId=211

Strong Spirit Strong Mind Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015, Government of Western Australia

The Strong Spirit Strong Mind Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Framework for Western Australian 2011–2015 underpins the Drug and Alcohol Interagency Strategic Framework for Western Australia 2011–2015 providing guidance to key stakeholders on culturally secure ways of working with Aboriginal people who are affected by alcohol and other drug use problems. Further information is available at www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/DesktopModules/Bring2mind/DMX/Download.aspx?Command=Core_Download&EntryId=614&PortalId=0&TabId=211

The National Drug Strategy 2010–2015, Commonwealth of Australia

The National Drug Strategy provides a comprehensive framework aimed at reducing the harm from alcohol and drug use across the Australian community. The strategy identifies specific objectives to reduce harm to families with reference to the needs of children living in families where alcohol or drug use is affecting them. Further information is available at [www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/DB4076D49F13309FCA257854007BAF30/\\$File/nds2015.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/DB4076D49F13309FCA257854007BAF30/$File/nds2015.pdf)

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020, Commonwealth of Australia

This framework is a long-term, collaborative approach aimed at reducing child abuse and neglect. It sets out key strategies with supporting outcomes and actions that will be delivered in a series of three-year strategies. Further information is available at www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/protecting-children-is-everyones-business

Want to know more?

The Australian National Council on Drugs has also published a comprehensive research report, *Drug Use in the Family: Impacts and implications for children*. The paper is available to download at www.ancd.org.au

Child Family Community Australia Research, Practice and Policy Information Exchange website at www.aifs.gov.au/cfca

A Picture of Australia's Children 2012, Commonwealth of Australia

This publication includes data at a national level on the rate of tobacco smoking in the home and information on parental alcohol and illicit drug use. The publication is available at www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=10737423340

Data tables

Table 3.58: Lifetime risk status, recent drinkers aged 14 years or older: in per cent, states and territories, 2010

	WA	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Abstainers (a)	17.0	21.8	20.9	16.8	19.0	14.4	13.5	13.7	19.5
Low risk (b)	60.3	59.6	60.6	60.0	61.7	66.1	67.0	56.9	60.4
Risky (c)	22.7	18.6	18.4	23.2	19.3	19.4	19.5	29.4	20.1

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report*, Drug statistics series no. 25 Cat no. PHE 145

(a) Not consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months.

(b) On average, had no more than two standard drinks per day.

(c) On average, had more than two standard drinks per day.

Table 3.59: Single occasion risk status, recent drinkers aged 14 years or older: in per cent, states and territories, 2010

	WA	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Aust
Abstainers (a)	17.0	21.8	20.9	16.8	19.0	14.4	13.5	13.7	19.5
Low risk (b)	39.7	41.7	41.1	38.3	42.7	45.1	42.0	35.5	40.7
Risky									
At least yearly (c)	12.3	10.6	11.4	11.8	11.0	11.5	15.1	11.3	11.3
At least monthly (d)	13.2	11.0	12.3	15.0	11.2	13.1	15.9	14.9	12.5
At least weekly (e)	17.9	15.0	14.4	18.1	16.1	15.8	13.6	24.7	15.9
Total risky	43.3	36.6	38.0	44.9	38.4	40.4	44.5	50.8	39.8

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report*, Drug statistics series no. 25 Cat no. PHE 145

(a) Not consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months.

(b) Never had more than four standard drinks on any occasion.

(c) Had more than four standard drinks at least once a year but not as often as monthly.

(d) Had more than four standard drinks at least once a month but not as often as weekly.

(e) Had more than four standard drinks at least once a week.



Table 3.60: Lifetime and single occasion risk, people aged 14 years or older: in per cent, by social characteristics, Australia, 2010

	Lifetime risk			Single occasion risk		
	Abstainer (a)	Low risk (b)	Risky (c)	Low risk (d)	At least yearly (e)	At least weekly (f)
Single with dependent children	19.1	62.3	18.6	37.2	26.8	16.9
Couple with dependent children	15.4	65.1	19.5	40.2	30.1	14.3

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report*, Drug statistics series no. 25 Cat no. PHE 145

- (a) Not consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months.
- (b) On average, had no more than two standard drinks per day.
- (c) On average, had more than two standard drinks per day.
- (d) Never had more than four standard drinks on any occasion.
- (e) Had more than four standard drinks at least once a year but not as often as weekly.
- (f) Had more than four standard drinks at least once a week.

Table 3.61: Illicit drug use, people aged 14 years or older: in per cent, by social characteristics, Australia, 2007 and 2010

	Never used		Ex-users (a)		Recent users (b)	
	2007	2010	2007	2010	2007	2010
Single with dependent children	40.8	39.9	41.5	39.1	17.7	20.9
Couple with dependent children	50.5	49.3	38.8	40.0	10.7	10.8

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2011, *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report*, Drug statistics series no. 25 Cat no. PHE 145

- (a) Somebody who has used, but not in the previous 12 months.
- (b) Used in the previous 12 months.