

## Alcohol remains leading cause for drug treatment in Australia

**15 April 2025**

The number of Australians receiving treatment for alcohol continues to eclipse all other drugs, highlighting the urgent need to address the predatory marketing practices of alcohol companies.

New [data released today](#) by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows alcohol was the principal drug of concern for people seeking treatment in 2023-24, accounting for two in five (42 per cent) of the 219,277 episodes of treatment – compared to amphetamines (26 per cent), cannabis (16 per cent) and heroin (4 per cent).

Principal drugs of concern are defined by the AIHW as, ‘the main substance that the client stated led them to seek treatment from an alcohol and drug treatment agency’.

While 131,892 people accessed treatment, a slight increase from 131,500 in the previous year, there’s still far too many people unable to get the support they need. Recent research estimates that between 207,000<sup>i</sup> and 500,000<sup>ii</sup> Australians who need help for addiction cannot access it.

Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) Director of Policy and Research, Dr Catherine Earl said the report shows that more needs to be done to better regulate alcohol companies that relentlessly target people with advertising.

“We know that many of the people in our communities who are seeking treatment for alcohol use are at the same time often aggressively targeted by alcohol companies through online ads on social media, and other online platforms.

“Alcohol companies are collecting more data on people than ever before, so when every phone is both a billboard and a bottle shop, it’s almost impossible for people to escape these ads when they are trying to cut back.”

Professor Dan Lubman, Executive Clinical Director of Turning Point and Director of the Monash Addiction Research Centre, said the new data highlights a large gap between the demand for and availability of support, and the impact of stigma and inadequate health promotion.

“Last year, around 400 more Australians accessed alcohol and drug treatment compared to the previous year. While it’s encouraging to see more people getting help, it’s concerning that the increase isn’t larger,” said Professor Lubman.

“While we know about half a million Australians need support for alcohol or drug issues, fewer than 132,000 received it. This gap highlights a significant shortfall in our healthcare system.

“The recent federal Parliamentary Inquiry into the health impacts of alcohol and drug use recommended that the 48th Parliament complete a full report into the issue. It’s vital that this goes ahead.

“These numbers aren’t just statistics. They represent real people - friends, family, coworkers and neighbours. It’s critical that all Australians can access the treatment and support they need to live healthy and meaningful lives.”

Dr Earl added that bold action from governments is needed to ensure community safeguards are adequate for our digital age and are helping protect Australians who experience the greatest impacts from alcohol harm.

“There are common sense measures that can make a real difference now, like changes to the Privacy Act, ensuring people’s data isn’t collected to market addictive products to those already struggling with alcohol.

“State and territory governments also have a role to play, and should update their liquor laws to ensure stronger protections around the delivery of alcohol, including a ban on late night home delivery and a two-hour safety pause between an order being placed and delivered.

“We need to do more to prevent this harm, we need the Federal and State Governments to implement the common sense protections that will put the health and wellbeing of families and communities ahead of the interests of the alcohol industry.”

The new data showing alcohol is the most common principal drug of concern is contained in the AIHW’s report: [Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: Early insights](#).

-ENDS-

Media outlets are requested to promote help-seeking information when reporting on alcohol and other drugs, in line with the [Mindframe National Guidelines](#). Suggested wording relating to this media story: *If you or someone you know needs support, please call Lifeline 13 11 14, the National 24/7 Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline 1800 250 015 or 1800RESPECT 1800 737 732.*

**Available for interview:**

- FARE Policy and Research Director, Dr Catherine Earl
- Turning Point CEO, Professor Dan Lubman

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**The Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is a not-for-profit organisation with a vision for an Australia free from alcohol harms – where communities are healthy and well and where laws, policies and programs are fair, equitable and just. Working with local communities, people with lived experience of alcohol harm, values-aligned organisations, health professionals, researchers and governments across the nation, we are improving the health and wellbeing of everyone in Australia. To learn more about us and our work visit [www.fare.org.au](http://www.fare.org.au)

**Turning Point** is a national treatment, research and education centre that provides leadership in the alcohol and other drug, gambling and mental health sectors. Combining innovative clinical and population health research and expert policy advice with service innovation, surveillance, system enhancements, capacity building and specialist support, Turning Point empowers people, communities, services and governments to respond to current and emerging alcohol, other drug, and gambling harms. Turning Point is part of Eastern Health and is affiliated with Monash University.

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<sup>i</sup> Ritter A, O'Reilly K. Unmet treatment need: The size of the gap for alcohol and other drugs in Australia. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2025; 44(3): 772–782.

<sup>ii</sup> Ritter A, Chalmers J, Gomez M. Measuring Unmet Demand for Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment: The Application of an Australian Population-Based Planning Model. *J Stud Alcohol Drugs Suppl.* 2019 Jan;Sup 18(18):42–50.