

Development and presentation of ambulance attendance data for timely national reporting on alcohol and other drugs, mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours

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Introduction: The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) provides authoritative and accessible statistics and information that governments, researchers and the community can use to inform decision-making. As an independent statutory Australian Government agency, the AIHW has a pivotal role in providing evidence-led approaches across many subject matter areas including, alcohol and other drug (AOD) use, suicide and self-harm, mental health, and family, domestic and sexual violence.

Approach: The development of regular, consistent ambulance attendance information for reporting at the national level considered key variables of the data coded in the National Ambulance Surveillance System (NASS) to inform the nature and extent of attendances for AOD, mental health, and suicide and self-harm in 6 of 8 states and territories in Australia and to highlight those at increased risk.

Key Findings: Findings from the NASS are reported regularly by the AIHW, across a range of topics and reporting products, reflective of the wide-ranging nature of the data. The presentation of monthly trend data across all 6 jurisdictions consistently shows that the highest rates of ambulance attendances were those for alcohol intoxication, with lower attendances for all other drugs reported. Ambulances attended around 90,100 incidents, or an average around 9,000 incidents each month, that involved suicidal thoughts and behaviours (suicidal ideation or suicide attempt) in 2021, across 5 jurisdictions. Variations in attendance rates by gender and age provide further insights into those most at risk in these populations.

Discussion and Conclusions: Incorporating findings from NASS into AIHW's reporting, including their timely and regular reporting for monitoring purposes, insights are provided into these ambulance services responses aimed at reducing the adverse effects of emergency events on the community.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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