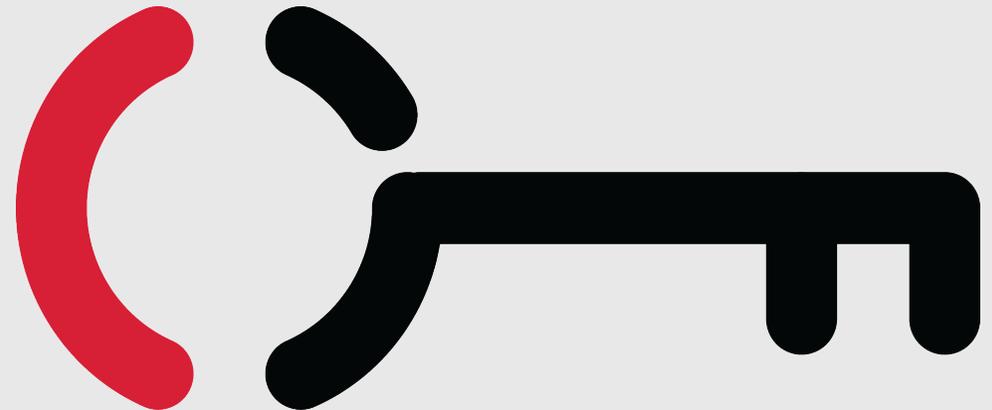


# Substance Use and Related Harms Among Australians Aged 50 Years and Older 2001-2021

Robert Taylor, Manager - Policy & Engagement  
APSAD Conference 2024



# Acknowledgement and Disclosure of Interest

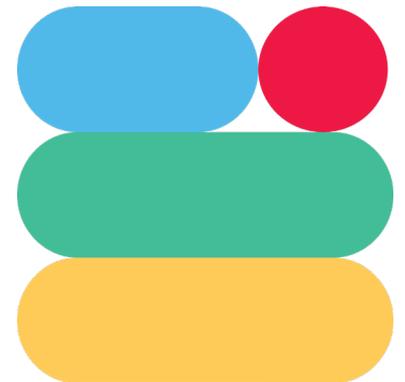
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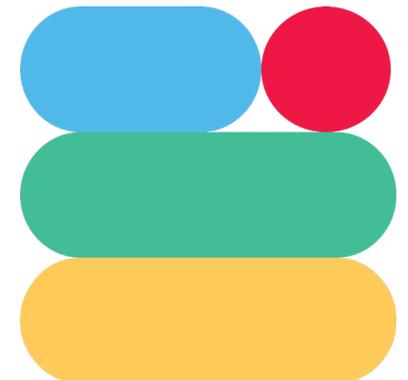
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- Completed June 2024, updated October 2024 with NDSHS 22/23 data
- This work was funded by the Department of Health, Victoria.



# Why we did this research

- Australia has an **ageing population**, in 2021 Australians **aged 50 and above** made up **over a third (35%)** of the population.
- Many older adults have an **increased risk** of certain AOD-related harms. Changes in physical and mental wellbeing, feelings of isolation and increased likelihood of being prescribed medication and using multiple medications, all contribute to the risk of harm.
- As a part of the ageing process, older adults become more vulnerable to harms and can **become more sensitive to alcohol**, **increasing the risk** of falls, bone fractures, and other **injuries**.

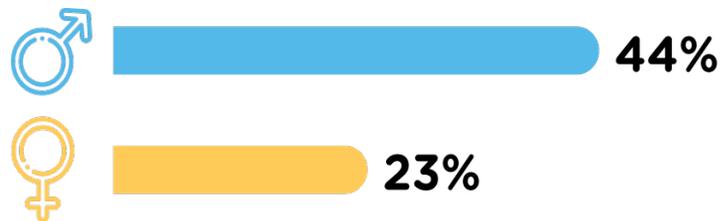
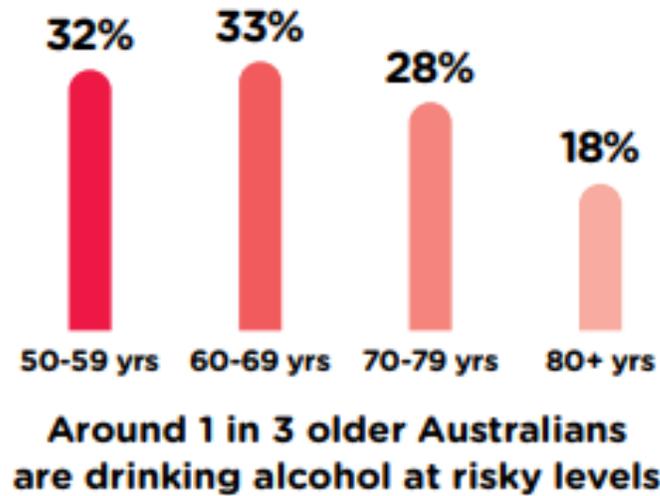


# Methodology

- Commissioned NDARC to identify older adult subgroups at risk and associated risk factors.
- Trends among Australians aged 50 and over were identified within AOD:
  - related hospitalisations from 2002-03 to 2020-21
  - induced deaths from 2000 to 2021
  - treatment episodes from 2002-03 to 2020-21
  - past year use from 2001 to 2022-23.



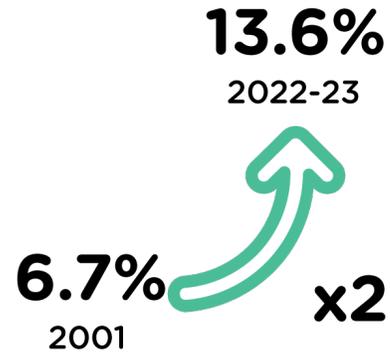
# What we found: Trends in alcohol use



Risky drinking in men vs women aged 60-69

- 70+ age group lowest proportion of risky drinking of all age groups
- Older adults in their 60s and 70s just as likely to drink in risky ways in 2022-23 as 12 years ago
- 50 to 59-year-olds drinking at risky levels has decreased from 36% in 2010 to 32% in 2022-23
- Gender differences in risky alcohol consumption.

# What we found: Trends in drug use



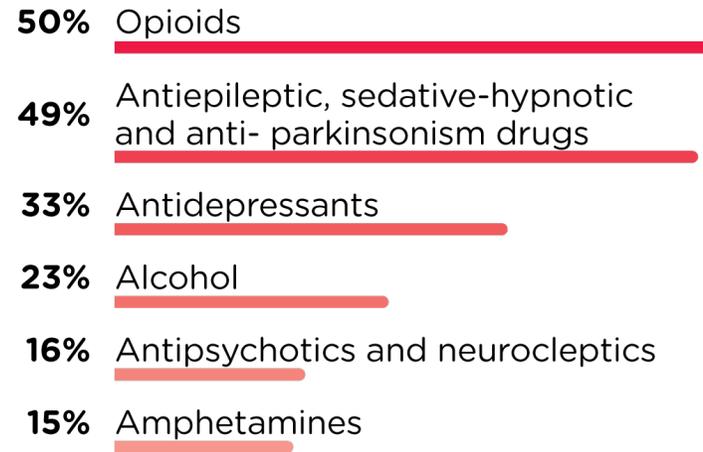
Use of any illicit drug has nearly doubled in people in their 50s



Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug for older people

- Between 2001 and 2022–23, use of any illicit drug in the past year nearly doubled among people in their 50s (from 6.7% to 13.6%)
- Past year illicit drug use also increased in those aged 60 and over (from 3.9% in 2001 to 7.8% in 2022–2023).
- Similar increases for males (from 8.1% to 16.1%) and females (5.2% and 11%)

# What we found: Trends in medications use



The most common drug types involved in drug overdose deaths



People aged 80+ highest rates of scripts for opioids and benzodiazepines

- Among people aged 80+ the rate of scripts dispensed for opioids was at least twice as high as people in younger age groups
- Females aged 80+ had highest dispensing rates of any group for opioids and benzodiazepines
- In 2022–23, 4.0% of people in their 50s and 3.7% of people aged 60 and over reported recent use of a pharmaceutical for non-medical purposes, compared with 5.3% of all people aged 14 and over.

# Groups and substances with most AOD harms



Men



Cannabis use



People aged  
50-59 years



Alcohol use



Opioid and/or  
benzodiazapine use



Amphetamine-type  
stimulant use

# Risk factors

The following identified risk factors for older adults should be considered when developing interventions:

**Using drugs at home alone**

**Polysubstance / pharmacy use**

**Living remotely or rurally**

**Psychosocial risk factors**

# Conclusions and next steps

The findings help build our understanding of which subgroups should be priorities in future interventions to reduce AOD harm.

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