

## Trends in GHB use and harms in Australia: Findings from Drug Trends

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**Introduction:** There are reports of rising harms from gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) and 1,4-butanediol (1,4-BD) (hereafter collectively called 'GHB') in several Australian jurisdictions. The aim of this study was to identify national trends in: i) GHB use among samples of people who regularly use illicit drugs, and ii) population-level indicators of harm.

**Methods:** Data comprised interviews with people who regularly use ecstasy and/or other illicit stimulants (Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System; 2011 to 2023); interviews with people who regularly inject drugs (Illicit Drug Reporting System; 2020 to 2023); hospitalisations with a GHB-related diagnosis (National Hospital Morbidity Database; 2011-12 to 2020-21) and treatment episodes with GHB as principal drug of concern (Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Data Set; 2011-12 to 2021-22). Data were analysed using joinpoint regression analysis where possible.

**Results:** In 2023, past six-month GHB use was reported by 12% of people who regularly use ecstasy and 18% of people who regularly inject drugs (previously 11% and 10% or less, respectively). GHB-related hospitalisations increased from 2018-19; methamphetamine was commonly identified as involved. The largest increase in hospitalisations was observed in Victoria, followed by New South Wales. Drug treatment episodes with GHB as a principal diagnosis of concern increased from 2018-19.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** GHB use is rising among some people who use illegal drugs, and population-level harms are increasing. Findings reinforce the importance of harm reduction education for consumers and clinical awareness among health professionals given the complexity of treating GHB overdose, dependence and withdrawal.

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