

Drugs and Health in Irish Prisons 2011

A Report for Prisoners



We would like to say **thank you** to all the prisoners who took part in this study. You have helped us to collect information so that the Irish Prison Service can plan drug treatment services, taking into account what you have to say.

We hope you find this booklet interesting. If you want more information, there is a detailed report on the website of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (NACDA) – www.nacda.ie You could ask a friend or family member to print a copy for you.

Dr Anne Drummond and Dr Mary Codd

The University College Dublin research team

The National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (NACDA)

Highlights

- Drug use is a big problem among prisoners in Ireland.
- 1 in 8 prisoners has hepatitis C.
- 1 in 50 prisoners has HIV.
- 1 in 300 prisoners has hepatitis B.
- If a drug treatment service is available, nearly all the prisoners who need it will use it.



Plain English
Approved by NALA

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About this booklet

What is this booklet about?

In spring 2011 we did a research study on drugs and health in every prison in Ireland. This booklet tells you about the study and what we found out.

Why am I getting this booklet?

Many prisoners took part in the study. We promised to tell them what we found out so we have decided to give a copy of the booklet to every prisoner.

Who paid for the study and who did it?

The National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (NACDA) and the Irish Prison Service (IPS) paid for the study. A team of researchers from University College Dublin did the research and wrote this report and a more detailed report.

Why was the study done?

We wanted to find out how many prisoners use drugs and how they use them. We also wanted to find out how many prisoners have health problems like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. Hepatitis is a serious liver disease. HIV is a serious immune disease. The IPS can only plan to improve drug treatment and health services if they know how big the problem is.

Did you not know that some prisoners use drugs?

We knew that a lot of prisoners use drugs before they come into prison and that many are dependent on drugs. We knew that some prisoners use drugs in prison and that some inject drugs in prison. This is not just in Ireland – it's the same in other countries.

We also knew that people who have injected drugs are more likely to have diseases like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV than people who have never injected. However, it is 10 years since any research on this was done in Irish prisons. We wanted to find out what the situation is today.

The Irish Prison Service – and the doctors, nurses and addiction counsellors – need to know how many prisoners use drugs so that they can put the right services in place for those who need them.

What will you do with the results?

We expect the IPS will use the results to plan drug treatment and harm reduction services and to improve health for all prisoners.

How was the study done?

We wanted to find out:

- how many prisoners use drugs;
- how they use them;
- how many prisoners have hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV;
- what drug treatment or harm reduction services prisoners use; and
- what services prisoners need.

We picked a random sample of prisoners so that the findings can be applied to all prisoners in Ireland. The Irish Prison Service gave us a list of PRIS numbers for everyone in custody aged 18 to 64. A computer then randomly picked prisoners from this list. Random means that everyone in this age group had a chance of being picked.

We asked these prisoners to take part in the study. We explained the study to them and gave everyone a chance to ask questions. We made sure they knew that any information they gave us was confidential and that no one could identify them from the information they gave us.

A total of 824 prisoners agreed to take part in the study. Each signed a consent form. They filled in the survey and gave us samples of their saliva (spit). We put a number on each person's survey and on their saliva samples. This let us link each survey to the right samples. We did not put anyone's name or PRIS number on the survey forms or samples so nobody could identify them.

We sent the samples to be tested for cannabis, benzodiazepines ('benzos'), methadone, heroin, other opiates and cocaine, and also for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV. Seventy samples went to the wrong laboratory. The company who got these said they destroyed them. There were no names on any of the samples so there were no data protection concerns. Because most people gave two saliva samples, we were able to test the second sample and so we could still report all the results.

We put all of the information from the surveys and the results of the saliva tests into a computer. The computer looked at all the information and gave us the results. These results tell us what all prisoners are saying about drugs and health in prisons.

What did you find out?

This section tells you the main things we found out about prisoners' general health and drug use and about the drug treatment services they need. If you want to know the actual numbers, you'll find these in the graphs towards the end of this booklet.

General health

- About 4 in 10 prisoners thought their health was good.
- About 4 in 10 said their health was very good or excellent.
- About 2 in 10 prisoners thought their health was only fair or poor.

Smoking and alcohol

- 9 out of 10 prisoners were smokers.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 prisoners drank alcohol in the year before they came into prison.

Drug use – ever

We asked people if they had **ever in their lives** used drugs.

- Nearly 9 out of 10 prisoners (men and women) had taken cannabis at some time in their life.
- 7 out of 10 prisoners had used cocaine powder at least once in their life.
- 6 out of 10 women prisoners had used heroin at least once in their life.
- 4 out of 10 men prisoners had taken heroin at some point in their life.
- 1 out of every 4 prisoners had overdosed on drugs at some stage in their life.
- 1 out of every 4 prisoners had injected drugs at least once in their life.
- 2 out of every 10 men and 4 out of every 10 women had injected heroin.
- About half of those who had injected drugs had shared needles, syringes or other 'works' at some time in their life.
- Nearly 6 out of every 10 prisoners who had ever injected drugs had overdosed on drugs at some stage in their life.

See page 6 for more

Drug use in the past year

We asked prisoners how many of them had taken drugs **in the past year**.

- About 7 out of every 10 prisoners had used cannabis in the past year.
- About half had used benzodiazepines and other sedatives or tranquillisers in the past year.
- About 1 in every 3 prisoners had taken heroin in the past year.
- Less than 1 in 10 prisoners had injected heroin in the past year.

See page 7 for more

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Drug use in prison in the past year

We asked those who had taken drugs in the past year whether they had used **in prison** during the past year.

- 4 out of every 10 prisoners who used cocaine powder in the last year had taken it in prison.
- 5 out of every 10 prisoners who used crack cocaine in the last year had taken it in prison.
- Nearly 7 out of every 10 prisoners who used opiates (apart from heroin and methadone) in the last year had taken them in prison.
- More than 8 out of every 10 prisoners who had used cannabis, benzodiazepines, other sedatives and tranquillisers, heroin and methadone in the last year had taken them in prison.
- Of those who had injected drugs in the past year, less than 3 out of every 10 had injected drugs while in prison.

Drug use in the past month

- About 4 out of every 10 prisoners had used cannabis in the past month.
- About 3 out of 10 had used benzodiazepines in the past month.
- Just over 1 out of every 10 prisoners had taken heroin in the past month.
- Very few prisoners – about 1 in 100 – had injected drugs in the past month. The drugs injected the most were cocaine and heroin.

See page 7 for more

Saliva drug test results

Saliva (spit) samples can only tell what drugs were used in the past 24 to 72 hours. We tested the saliva samples for cannabis, benzodiazepines ('benzos'), methadone, heroin, other opiates, and cocaine.

- Less than 1 out of 300 prisoners had taken opiates or cocaine in the 24–72 hours before the study.
- About 11 out of every 100 prisoners had taken benzodiazepines before the study.

- 13 out of every 100 prisoners had taken methadone before the study. This is about the same as the number of prisoners who are actually on methadone treatment. This means that the study results are probably very close to what is actually happening in the prisons.

Saliva test results for hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV

Hepatitis is a serious liver disease. HIV is a serious immune disease.

- About 1 out of every 300 prisoners had hepatitis B.
- 2 out of every 100 prisoners had HIV. These were more likely to be women prisoners, people who injected drugs, people who shared works and men who had sex with men.
- Nearly 13 out of every 100 prisoners had hepatitis C. These were more likely to be older prisoners, women prisoners, people who had injected drugs, people who had shared works and people who had a tattoo.

Drug treatment and harm reduction services

Services needed

We asked prisoners if they **ever needed** any of the drug treatment or harm reduction services that the Irish Prison Service offers.

- More than 4 in every 10 prisoners said they needed to see an addiction counsellor.
- About 2 in every 10 prisoners said they wanted to detox.
- 3 in every 10 prisoners wanted to go to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings.
- 4 in every 10 prisoners wanted to be on a drug-free wing in prison.
- About 1 in every 4 prisoners needed methadone maintenance.

See page 8 for more

Services available

We then asked prisoners whether services were **available** to those who needed them. Information like this helps healthcare staff in the prisons to plan services.

- 7 out of every 10 prisoners who needed methadone said they got it when they needed it.
- Only 2 out of every 10 prisoners who needed a detox from benzodiazepines ('benzos') got it when they needed it.
- 4 out of every 10 prisoners who needed to be on a drug-free wing had access to one.
- Only 3 out of every 10 prisoners who needed a drug-free treatment programme got it when they needed it.

[See page 9 for more](#)

Services used by prisoners

We asked prisoners whether they actually **used the services**. Yes, they did. If a service was there, nearly everyone who needed it used it.

- More than 9 out of every 10 people who needed an addiction counsellor went to see the counsellor if there was a counsellor in their prison.
- More than 8 out of every 10 prisoners took part in Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings if they were available in their prison.
- More than 8 out of every 10 prisoners used detox services if these were available.

[See page 9 for more](#)

Which prisons need drug treatment services most?

The Irish Prison Service needs to know where (in which prisons) the people who most need drug treatment are likely to be. We looked at the people who had taken heroin, methadone, other opiates, crack cocaine, cocaine powder or amphetamines in the past year and which prisons they were in during the study. This means they took one or more of these drugs at some time in the past year, though not necessarily in prison.

- Prisoners in Arbour Hill, Loughan House and Shelton Abbey had **low** drug use in the past year.
- Prisoners in Castlerea, Cork, Midlands, St. Patrick's Institution and the Training Unit had **medium** drug use in the past year.
- Prisoners in Limerick male prison, Mountjoy, Portlaoise and Wheatfield had **high** drug use in the past year.
- Prisoners in Cloverhill, the Dóchas Centre and Limerick female prison had **very high** drug use in the past year.

Low drug use in the past year	Medium drug use in the past year	High drug use in the past year	Very high drug use in the past year
Arbour Hill Loughan House Shelton Abbey	Castlerea Cork Midlands St. Patrick's Training Unit	Limerick Male Mountjoy Portlaoise Wheatfield	Cloverhill Dóchas Limerick Female

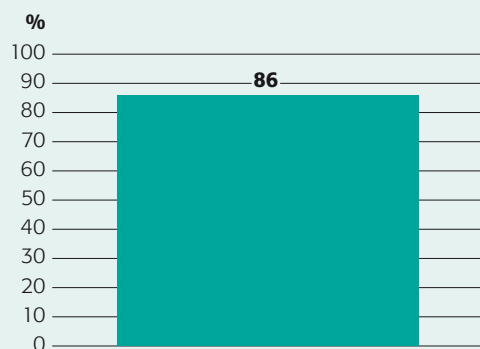
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Detailed findings

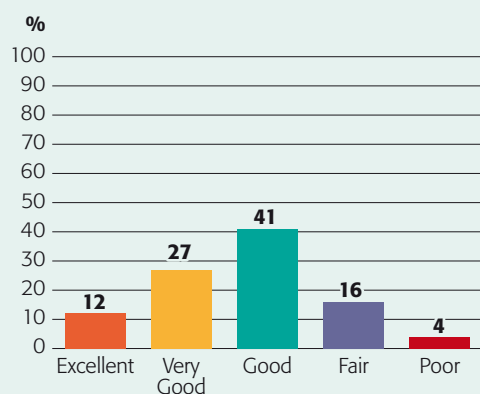
The graphs on the following pages tell you more about drug use and drug treatment services in prison. In each graph, the number that you see in each coloured bar shows 'the number out of every 100 prisoners'. For example, the next graph tells you that 86% of prisoners smoked. This means that 86 out of every 100 prisoners were smokers.

Do You Smoke Now?



General health

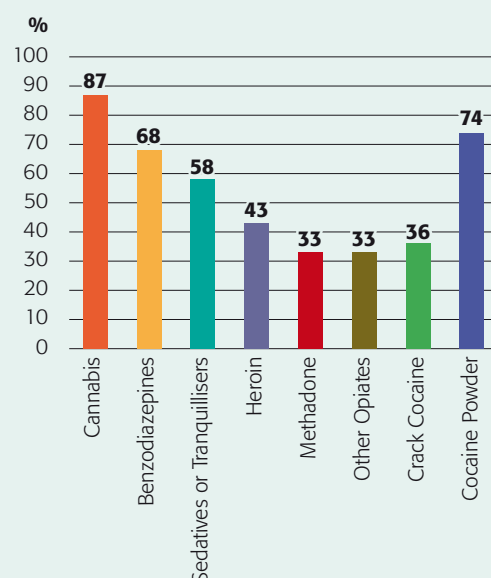
General health



The graph above shows that 41% – or 41 out of every hundred prisoners – thought their health was good. Four out of every 100 thought their health was poor.

Drug use – ever

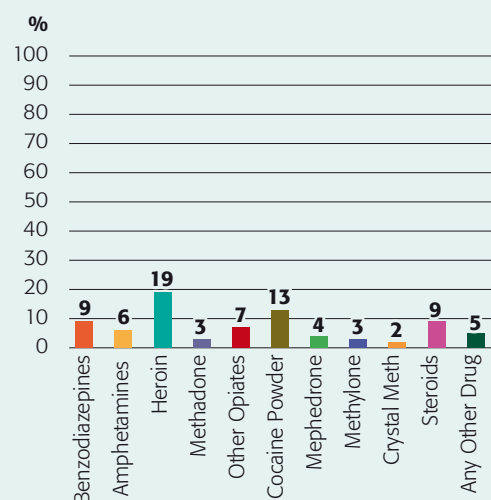
Have you ever used this drug in your lifetime?



We asked whether people had taken different drugs ever in their life. The graph above shows the results for each drug. For example, 87 out of every 100 prisoners had taken cannabis at some time in their life. On the other hand, only 33 out of every 100 prisoners had taken methadone at some point in their life.

Injected drugs – ever

Have you ever in your life injected this drug?



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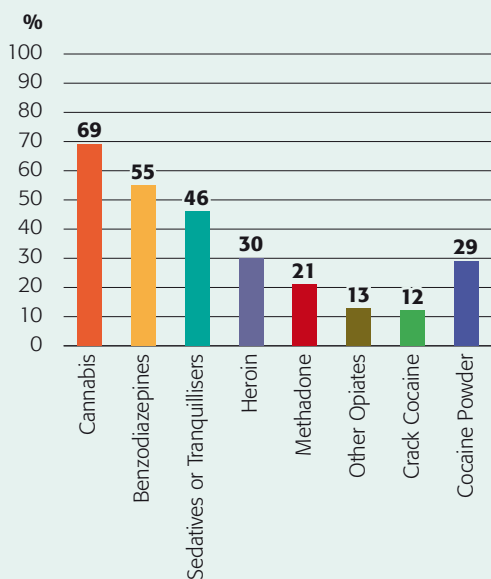
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Overall, 1 in every 4 prisoners (this is the same as 25 in every 100 prisoners) had injected drugs at some time in their life. The graph above shows how many people had injected which drug. For example, 19 out of every 100 prisoners had injected heroin at some time in the lives but only 2 out of every 100 had injected crystal meth.

We also found out that for nearly all drugs more women had injected them than men. For example, more than 2 out of every 10 men prisoners and 4 out of every 10 women prisoners had injected drugs.

Drug use in the past year

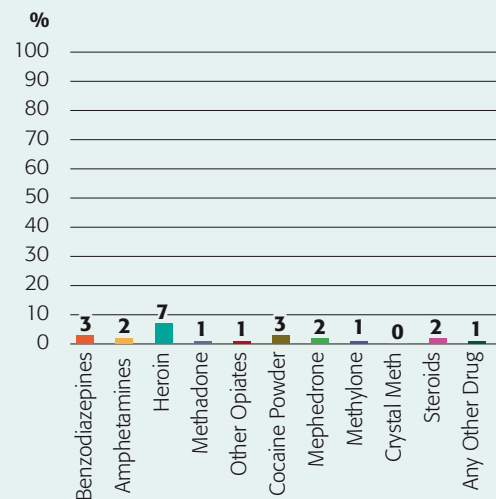
Have you used this drug in the last year?



We asked prisoners how many of them had taken drugs in **the past year**. The graph tells you 69 out of every 100 prisoners had taken cannabis in the past year. You can also see that 30 out of every 100 prisoners had taken heroin in the past year while 29 out of every 100 had taken cocaine powder.

We also asked whether anyone had **injected** drugs in the past year.

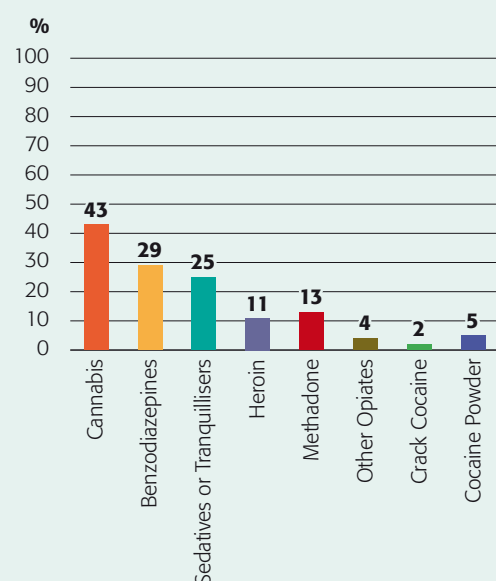
Have you injected this drug in the last year?



Heroin was the most commonly injected drug. Even so, only 7 out of every 100 prisoners had injected heroin in the past year.

Drug use in the past month

Have you used this drug in the last month?



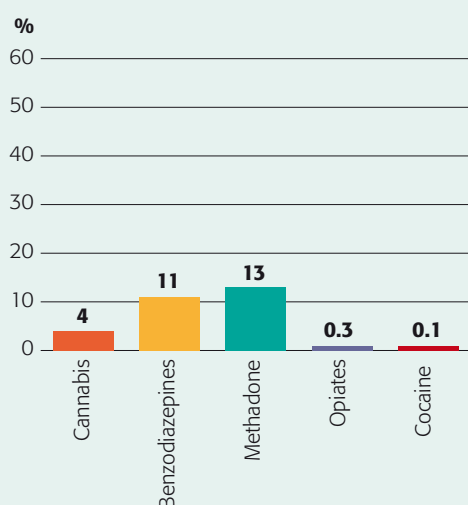
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We asked prisoners how many of them had taken drugs in the past month. The graph shows that 43 out of every 100 prisoners took cannabis in the past month while 5 out of every 100 prisoners took cocaine powder.

Saliva drug test results

Saliva test results. Drugs used in 24–72 hours before the study

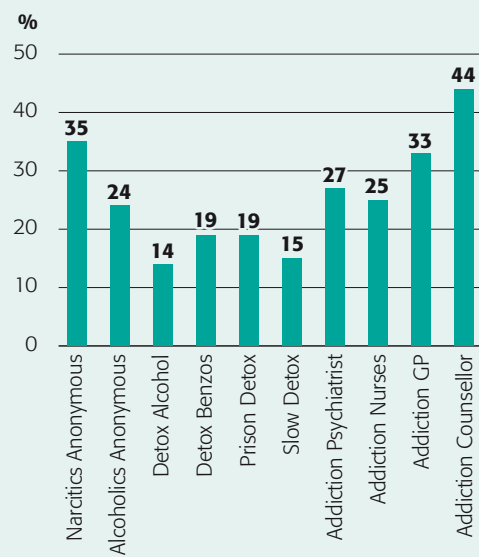


Saliva samples tell what drugs were used in the last 24–72 hours. The graph shows that just over 13 out of every 100 prisoners had taken methadone before the saliva test while nearly 11 out of every 100 prisoners had taken benzodiazepines. Less than 1 in 100 prisoners had taken either opiates or cocaine before the saliva test.

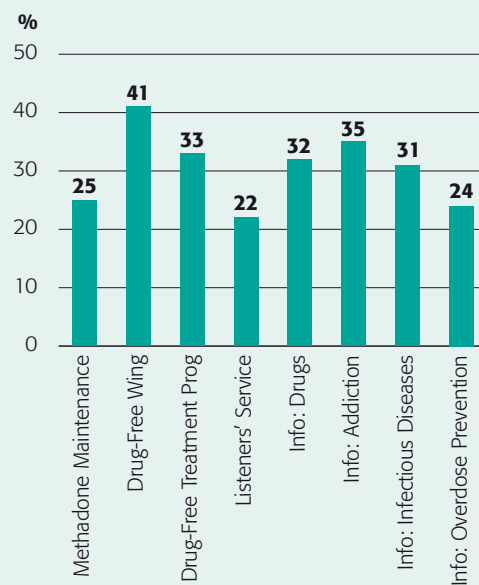
Drug treatment and harm reduction services

We asked prisoners if they **ever needed** any of the drug treatment or harm reduction services that the Irish Prison Service offers. You can see the results in the next two graphs. Remember the number in each bar is the number out of 100 who said they needed a service.

Yes to needing a service in prison



Yes to needing a service in prison



For example, 44 out of every 100 prisoners said they needed an addiction counsellor and 41 out of every 100 said they needed a drug-free wing. 25 out of every 100 prisoners said they needed methadone maintenance.

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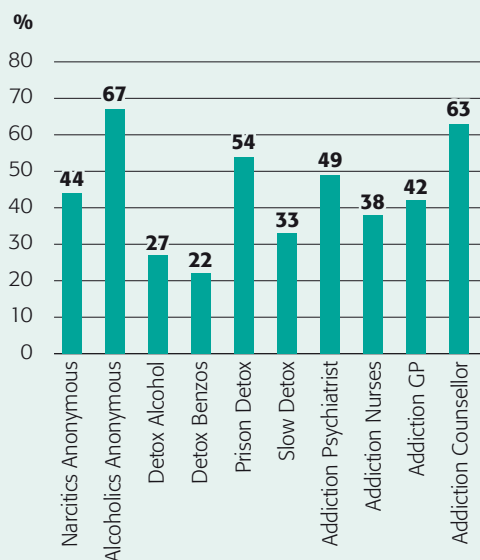
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We then asked whether each service **was available** to prisoners who needed it. You can see in the next 2 graphs that:

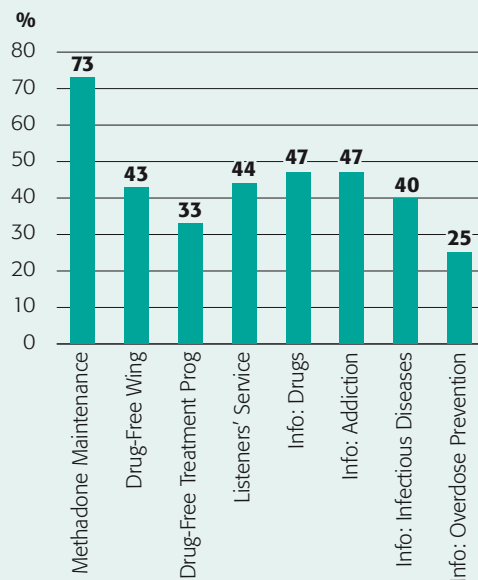
- 73 out of every 100 prisoners who needed methadone got it when they needed it; but
- only 22 out of every 100 prisoners who needed a detox from benzodiazepines got it when they needed it.

Information like this helps the healthcare staff in the Irish Prison Service to plan services.

Was the service there if you needed it?

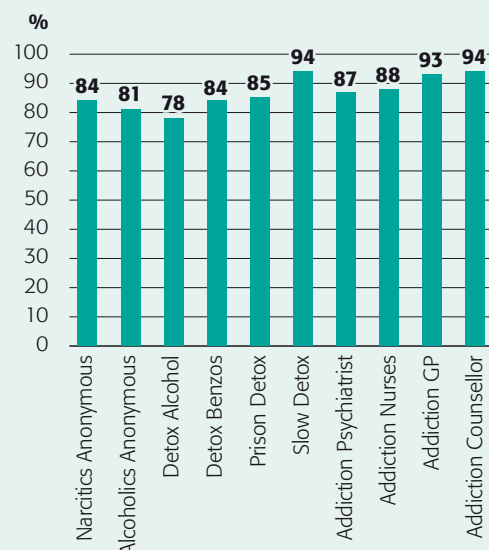


Was the service there if you needed it?



We also asked whether prisoners actually **used the services**. We found that if a service was there, nearly everyone who needed it used it. The next graph shows that 94 out of every 100 prisoners who needed an addiction counsellor went to see the counsellor if there was a counsellor in their prison.

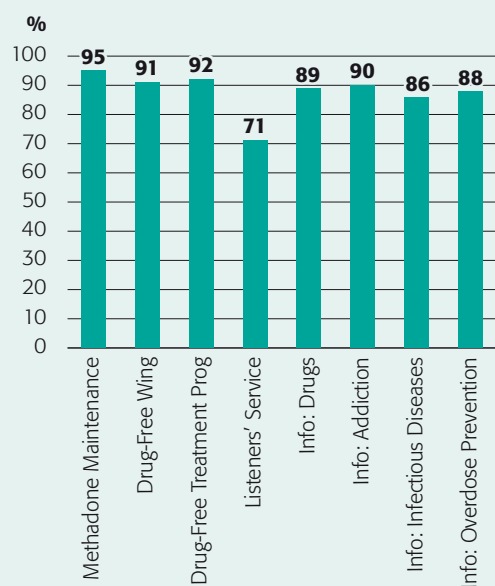
If you needed the service and it was there, did you use it?



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If you needed the service and it was there, did you use it?



You can ask to see a doctor or nurse in this prison if you:

- **have any questions about drug treatment services;**
- **have any questions about hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV; or**
- **would like to be tested for hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV.**

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National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol (NACDA)

Hawkins House
Hawkins St
Dublin 2

Tel: 00 353 1 635 4283
Email: nacda@nacda.ie
Web: www.nacda.ie

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